岩明均歴史作品集
雪の峠 剣の舞

KCDX1387

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ゆきのとうげ　つるぎのまい

Hitoshi Iwaaki 岩明均

講談社

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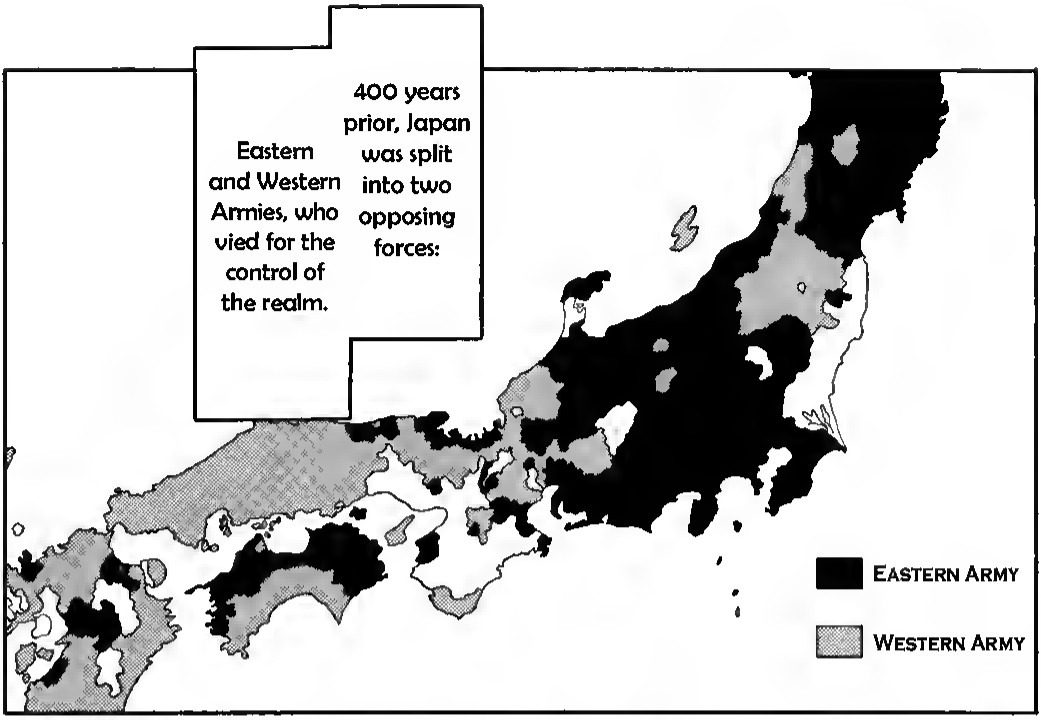
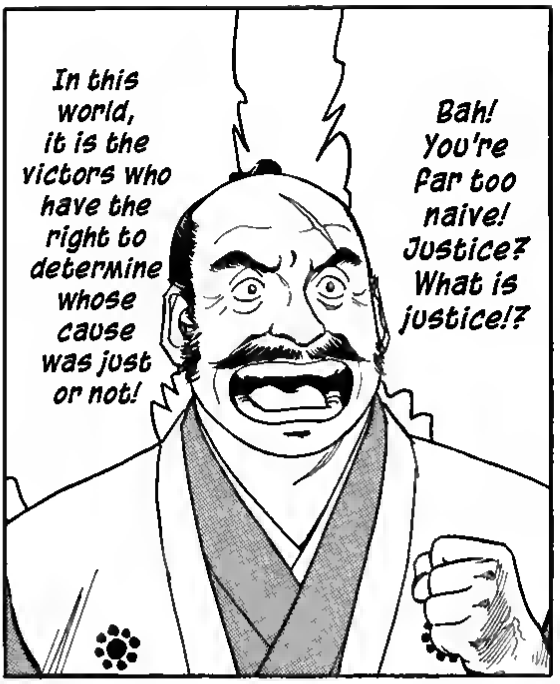
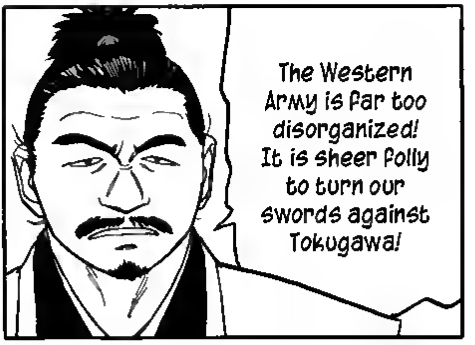
Snow Ridge

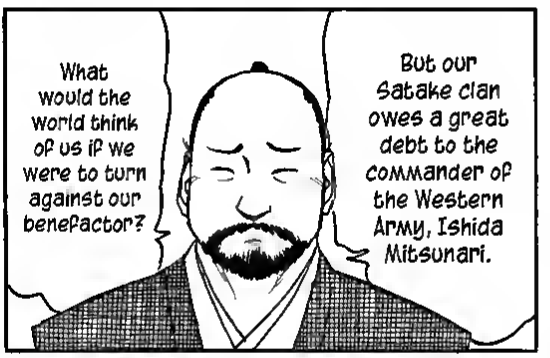
Chapter 1: Northern Sea

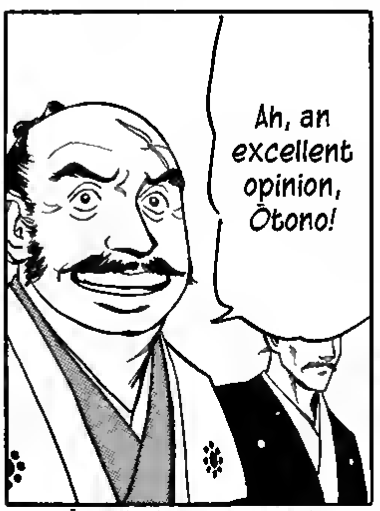

400 years prior, Japan was split into two opposing forces:
Eastern and Western Armies, who vied for the control of the realm.
EASTERN ARMY
WESTERN ARMY

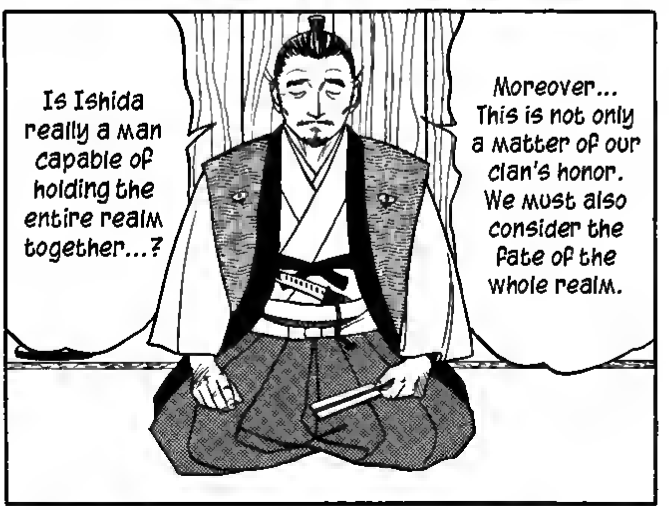
Yes, we must ally with Tokugawa!
East or West? This was the most pressing issue for every daimyo in Japan.
Eastern Army! It must be the Eastern Army!


In this world, it is the victors who have the right to determine whose cause was just or not!
Bah! You're far too naive! Justice? What is justice!?




What would the world think of us if we were to turn against our benefactor?
But our Satake clan owes a great debt to the commander of the Western Army, Ishida Mitsunari.

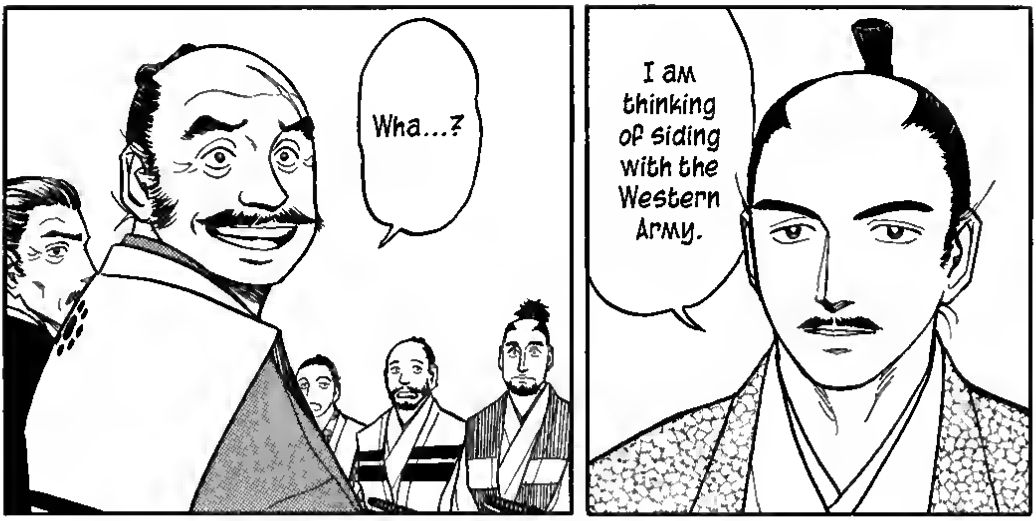



Is Ishida really a man capable of holding the entire realm together...?
Moreover... This is not only a matter of our clan's honor. We must also consider the fate of the whole realm.

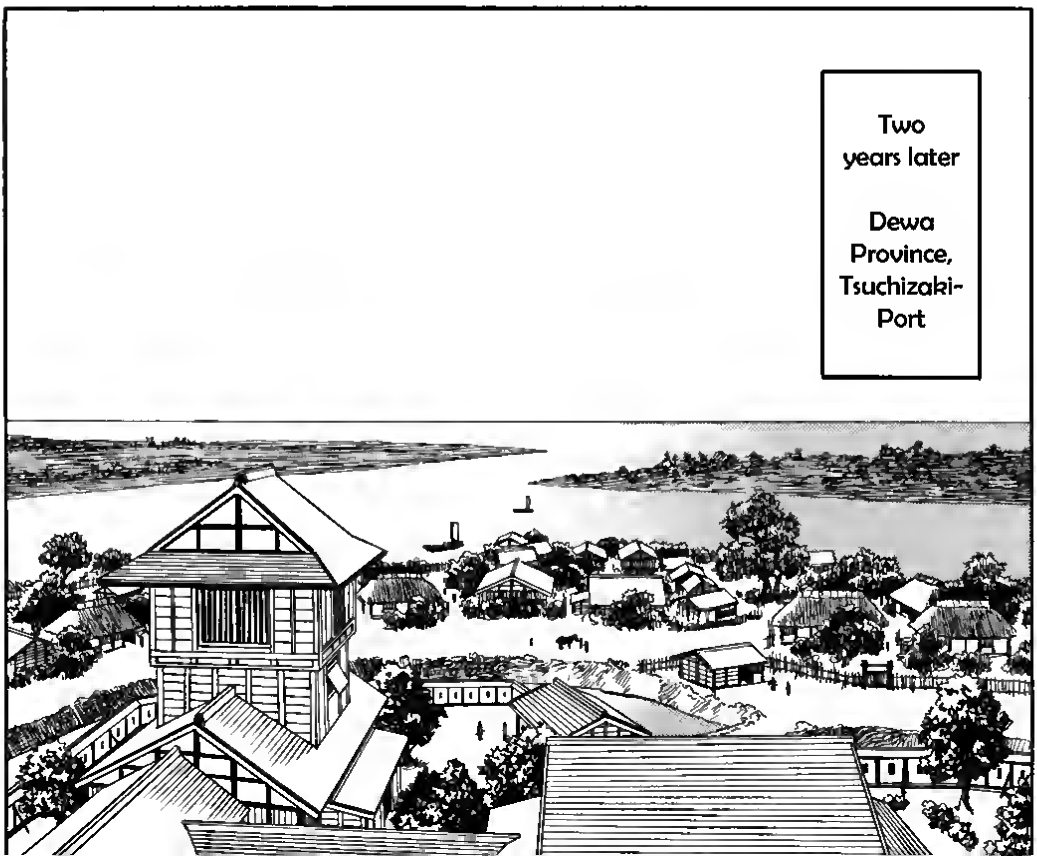
*Ōtono: Elder lord; A current daimyo's father

I do not believe I'm quite so qualified to judge who is or is not fit to rule over the entire realm. That being said, when taking into account of our clan's military might and the strategic value of our lands, if we were to side with the West, I believe the two forces would be evenly matched. On the other hand, the East would gain a clear superiority if we were to side with them.
There is no better choice than Tokugawa.
Do you not agree, Kajiwara?
That settles it then.
As you are all well aware of, our clan is capable of fielding a 20,000-strong army, comparable to the sixth most powerful lord in the entire realm.
Ah! You're suggesting it is our clan that can tip the scales in the coming conflict?
But if we side with the East and they prevail, can the safety of our Satake province be guaranteed?

Yes, sir...
...
What senseless blather is that!?
We are discussing who to side with! East or West!
Be quiet if you have nothing useful to say, Naizen!
No objections!
Y... Yes.
Now then, can I assume we retainers all support siding with the East?
There you have it, my lord!



In Keichō year 2 (1600),
the Tokugawa-led Eastern Army triumphed at the Battle of Sekigahara.



Watch-tower in the Tsuchizaki-Port's Castle
Satake Yoshinobu, daimyo and head of the Satake Clan
Ah, it's you, Naizen.
Excuse me, my lord.
Attendant, Shibue Naizen
Gazing at the sea again, my lord?
Yes... It's different from the sea in Hitachi. Somehow... Darker.
Is that so? I would have thought the sea was the same all over, since they're all connected...

...There is still some time before the meeting, correct?
Yes, my lord. About one hour.
Sigh... Just the thought of facing those old stuffy retainers is burdensome. They'll be sure to look at me with looks of resentment again...
It's a matter of perspective! You always try to explain away everything with only logic.
My gravest apologies.
Bringing that up again...?
Moreover, my lord is responsible for our clan's sudden relocation from Hitachi to Dewa.
It is not proper for a lord to feel that way towards his own retainers.
If only that were so...
Your retainers will be rejuvenated and be born anew!
If it turns out constructive, then we need no longer dwell upon past misfortunes.
Yes, it is a matter that we have all been disheartened by, after all. However, the meeting today is to discuss the very course of our Satake clan's future!

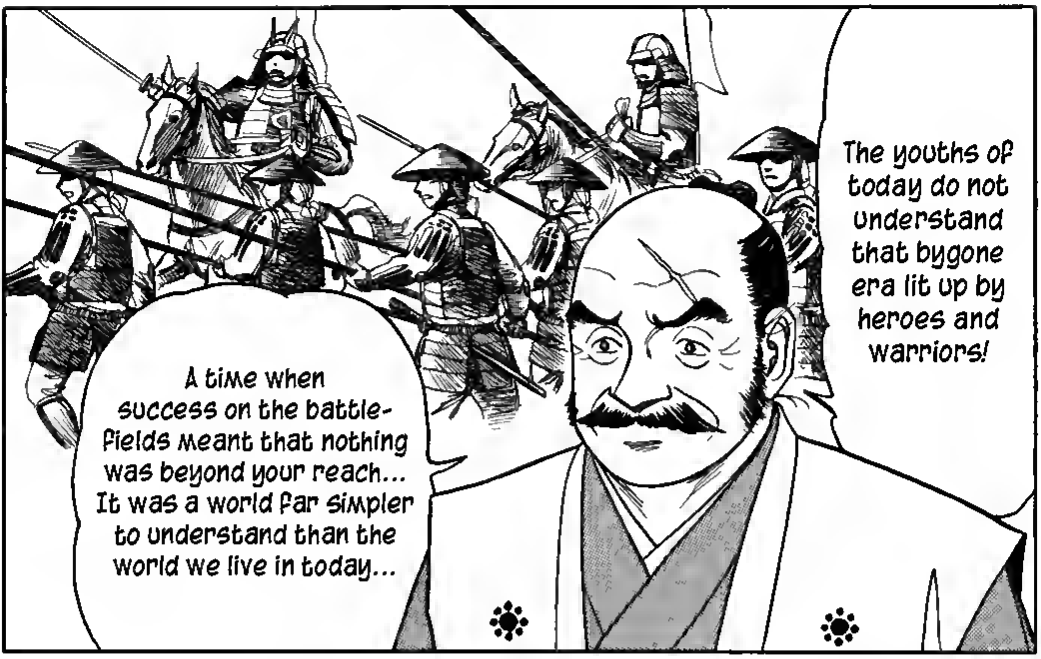
Retainers' Waiting Room
My lord...
To think our clan's income was reduced to a third... Tokugawa certainly is no man to trifle with.
If we had only sided with the Eastern Army...
But what are we to do in this godforsaken region all the way in the Northeastern corner of Honshu?
We should consider it a fortune that our clan was even spared from destruction.

Enough with the dispiriting talk!
But still... How many years has it been since we proved our worth in the battlefields of Kanto?
Silence! I'm sick and tired of that!
Harder said than done...
Karō
Kawai Ise-no-kami
If you wish to talk, then discuss something more hopeful!
Oh yes, but I would never tire of hearing them again. He was my hero back in the good old era...
I see... The "good old" times...
Won't you regale me with another tale of Kenshin?
Ah, Kajiwara.
Again? Have I not told you his tales more times than I can count?
Jūshin
Kajiwara Mino-no-kami

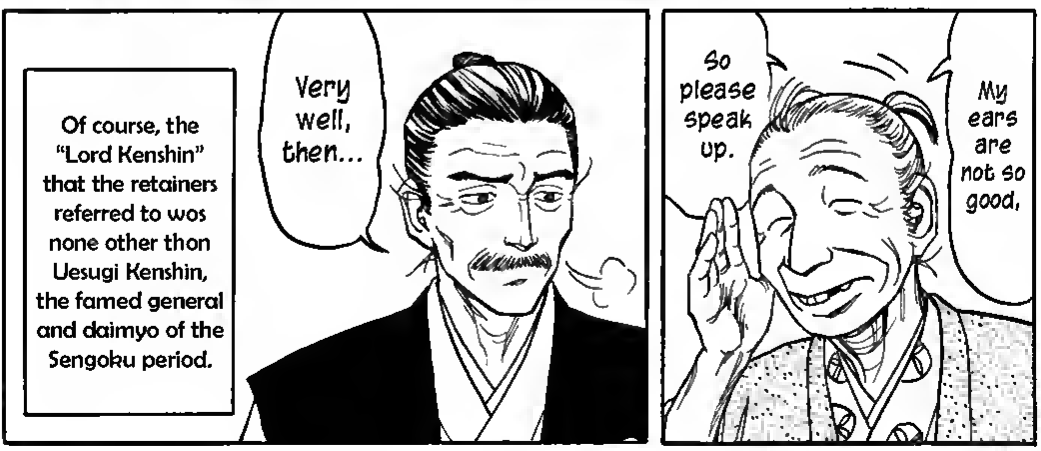
*Karō: Highest-ranking vassal under a daimyo

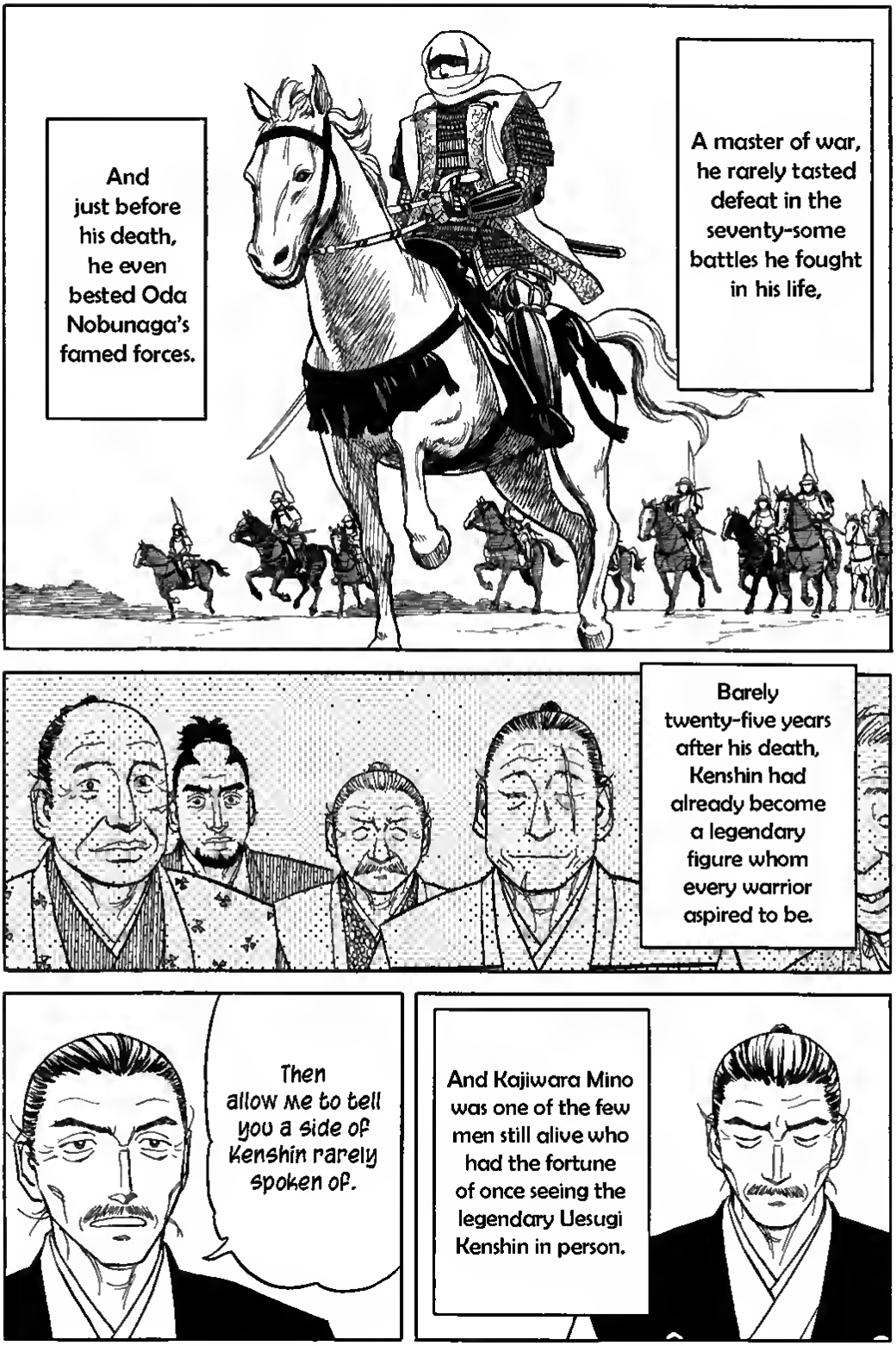
*Jūshin: The senior vassal/statesman of sorts, ranked just below the Karō

* -no-kami: Originally meant provincial governor but merely denoted an honourary title by the Sengoku period


A time when success on the battle-fields meant that nothing was beyond your reach... It was a world far simpler to understand than the world we live in today...
The youths of today do not understand that bygone era lit up by heroes and warriors!

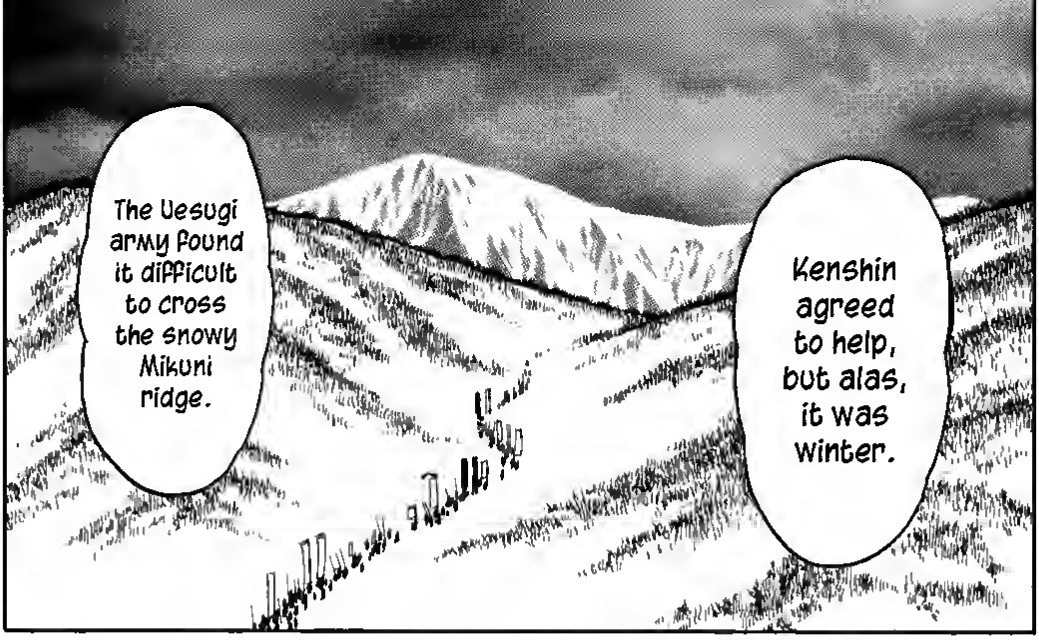
Yes, there's still some time left before the meeting, after all.
Please, do tell!
A tale about Lord Kenshin?

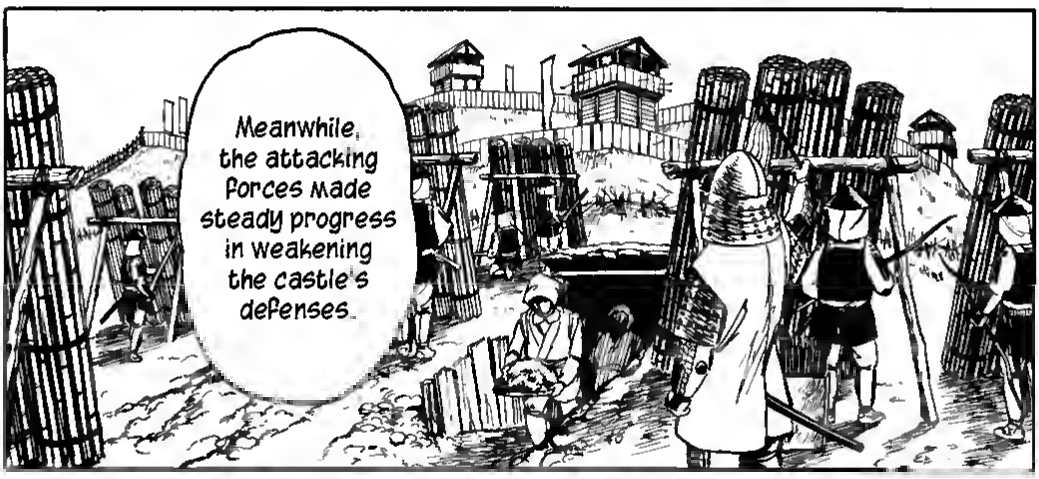

Of course, the "Lord Kenshin" that the retainers referred to was none other than Uesugi Kenshin, the famed general and daimyo of the Sengoku period.
Very well, then...
So please speak up.
My ears are not so good.


A master of war, he rarely tasted defeat in the seventy-some battles he fought in his life,
And just before his death, he even bested Oda Nobunaga's famed forces.
Barely twenty-five years after his death, Kenshin had already become a legendary figure whom every warrior aspired to be.
Then allow me to tell you a side of Kenshin rarely spoken of.
And Kajiwara Mino was one of the few men still alive who had the fortune of once seeing the legendary Uesugi Kenshin in person.

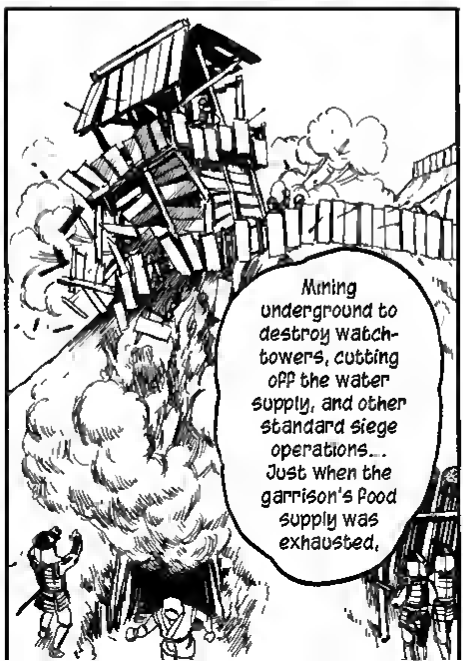
Former head of the Satake clan
Satake Yoshishige
Otono!
How interesting!
Ohh!
Please tell me as well.
Take this seat, sir.
Thank you.
You may remain in your seats.

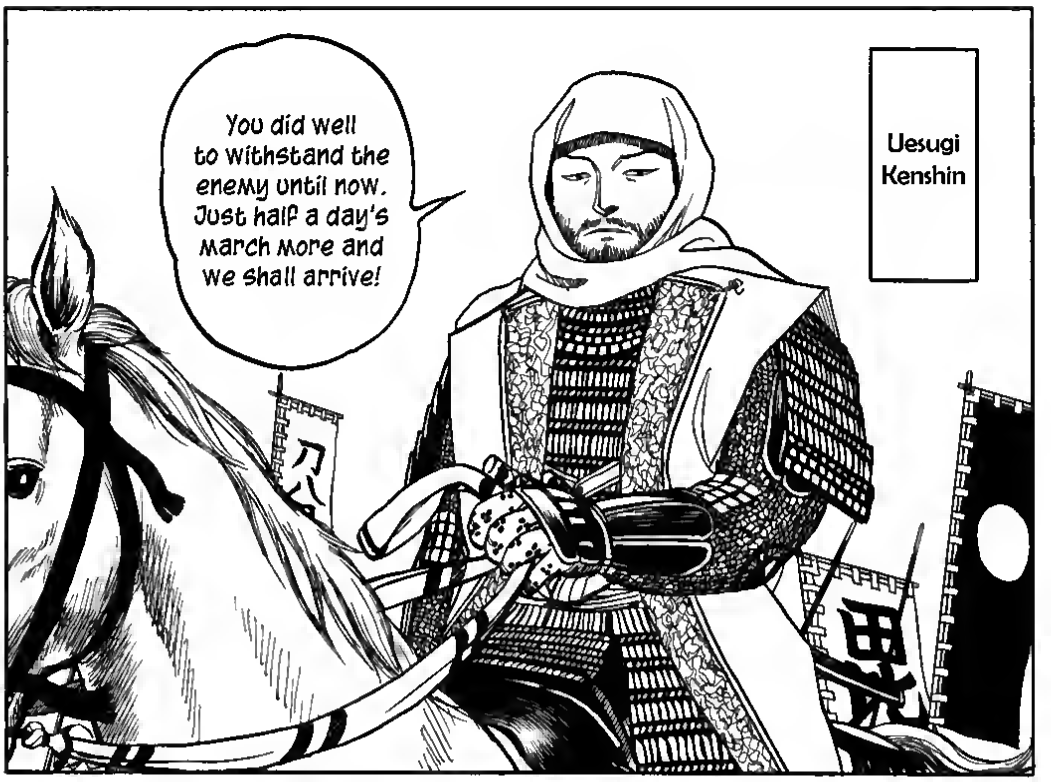
At the time, Matsuyama was a critically important castle on the province's borders, so it had been amply stocked with weapons, gunpowder, grain, and a garrison of 3,000 to guard it but...
My Father's castle in Musashi province, Matsuyama castle, found itself besieged by the combined forces of Takeda Shingen and Hōjō Ujiyasu.
Forty years ago, in the winter of the fifth year of Eiroku...
Seeing no alternate option, My Father sent an urgent request for aid from the Daimyo of Echigo: Uesugi Kenshin.
With such over-whelming numbers, it was almost impossible to even approach the castle, let alone save it.
Their number... 55,000!
八幡大菩薩
疾如風徐如林
掠如火不動如山
諏方南宮

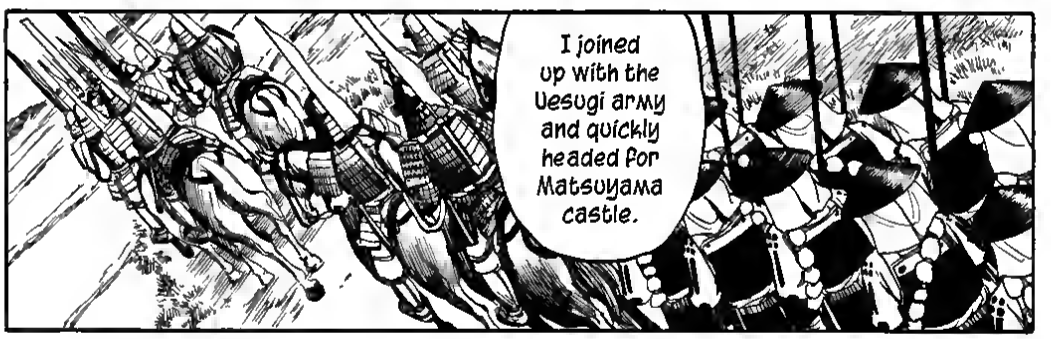

The Uesugi army found it difficult to cross the snowy Mikuni ridge.
Kenshin agreed to help, but alas, it was winter.

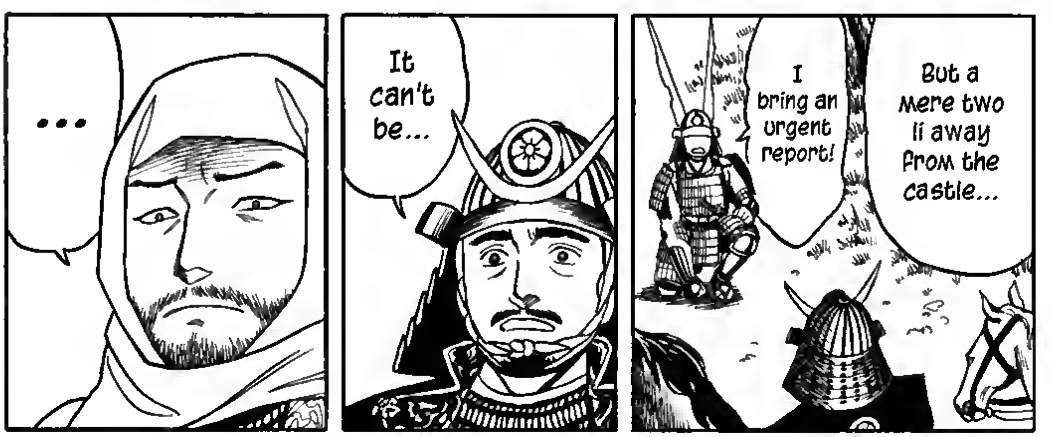

Meanwhile, the attacking forces made steady progress in weakening the castle's defenses.

Kenshin and his army had crossed the ridge and finally arrived!


Mining underground to destroy watch-towers, cutting off the water supply, and other standard siege operations... Just when the garrison's food supply was exhausted.

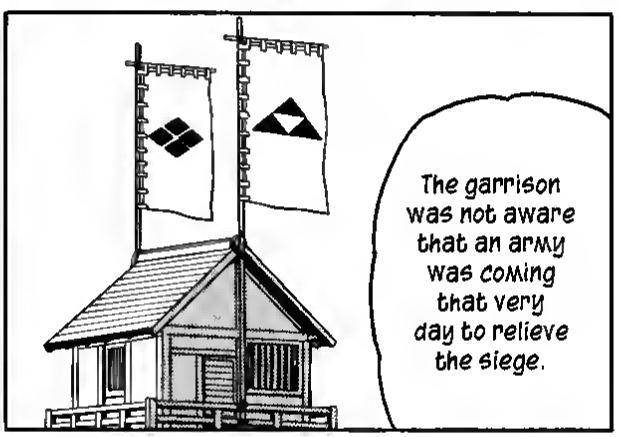


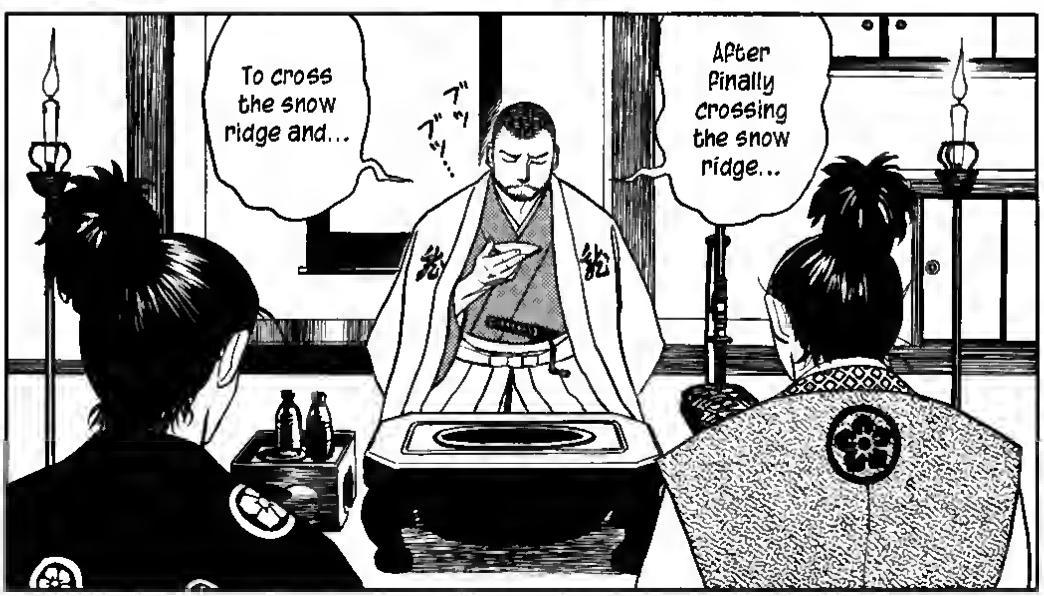


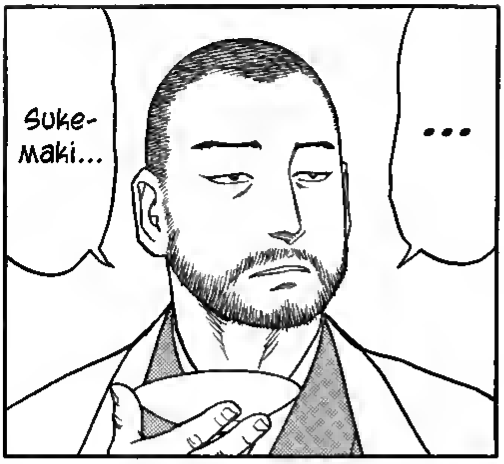


*One li is roughly 3.9 kilometers.

The castle's garrison had surrendered to the Takeda army that very day.
We were beat by a paper-thin margin.


The garrison was not aware that an army was coming that very day to relieve the siege.


To cross the snow ridge and...
ブツ ブツ...
After finally crossing the snow ridge...


Suke-
Maki...
...

I'm
terribly
sorry
for what
happened...

To
bring
them
here?
May
I ask
you,

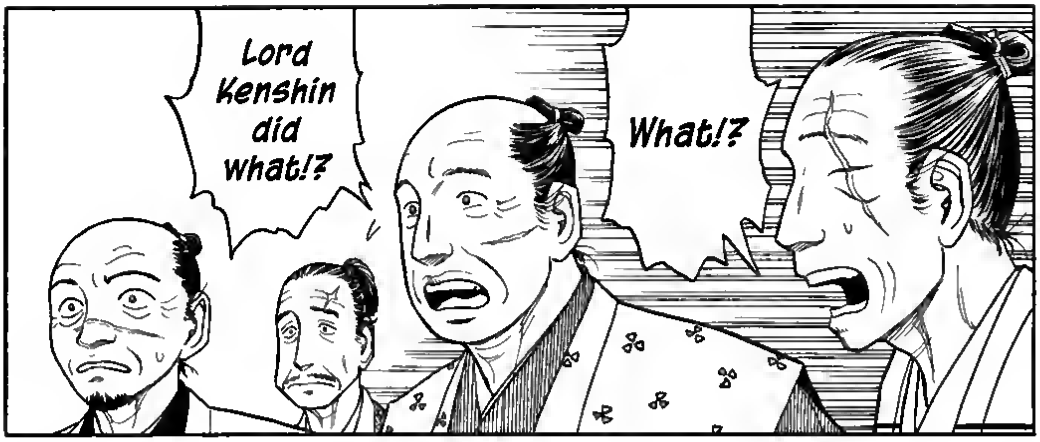
Hmm?
I heard the
garrison's
captain
entrusted
you with his
children...

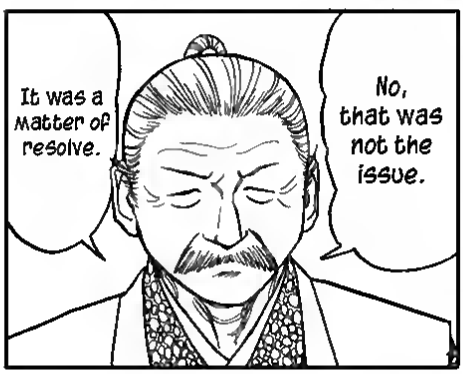
Bring
them
closer...

Genta.

Kajiwara
Genta
(Kajiwara
Mino as a
young man)
Yes,
Father!

I will never forget the expression on Lord Kenshin's face that moment.
Ahhhhh!
Wahhhh!


Lord Kenshin did what!?
What!?

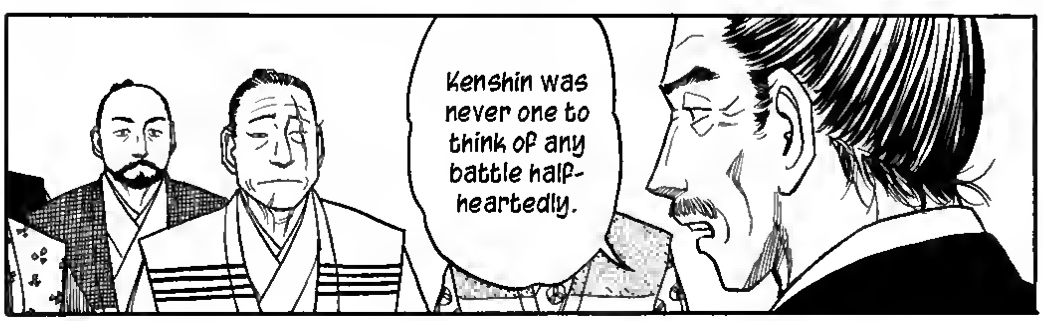

It was a matter of resolve.
No, that was not the issue.

It shows how frustrated he must have been to be beaten by a sliver...

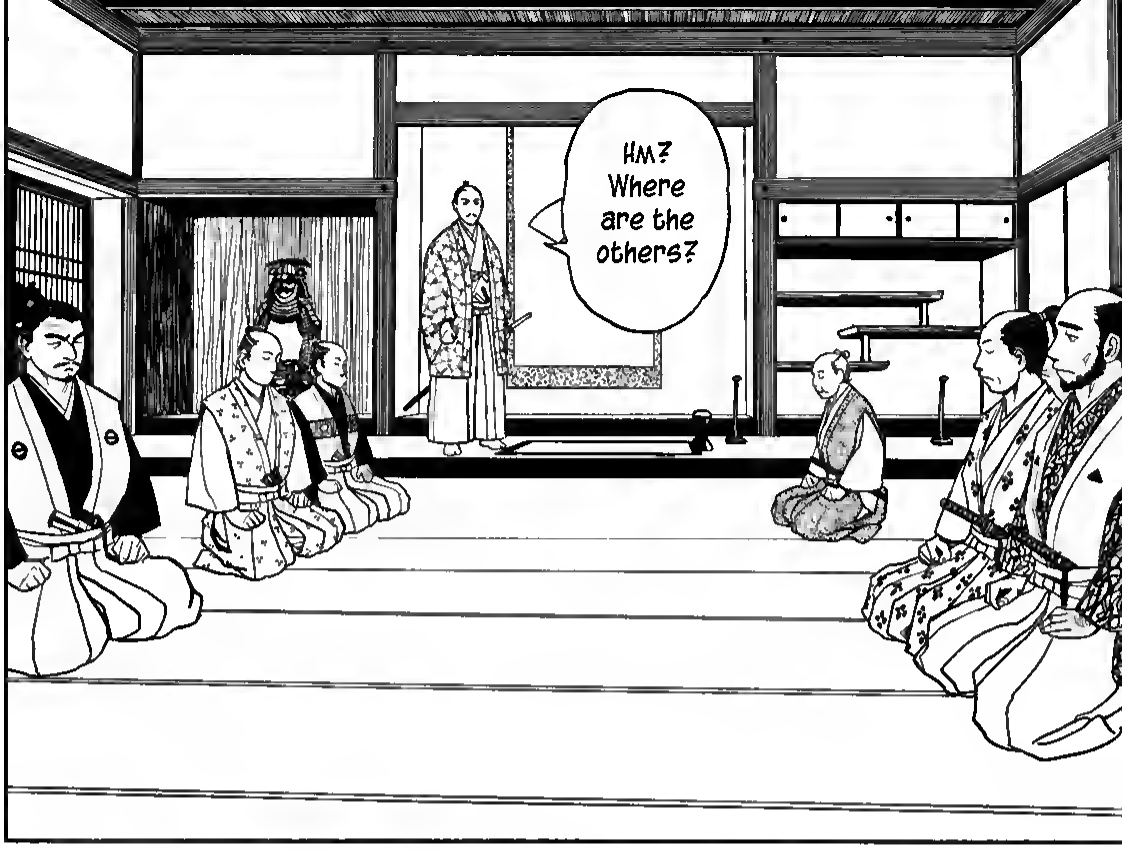
I cannot believe it... the slaying of two young children!?

His actions, cruel as it may seem, are a demonstration of the required severity of resolve in war.
However, the leader of tens of thousands of soldiers must show unwavering resolve when starting a war.
Yes... Kenshin did not wish to rob two children of their lives by his own hand.

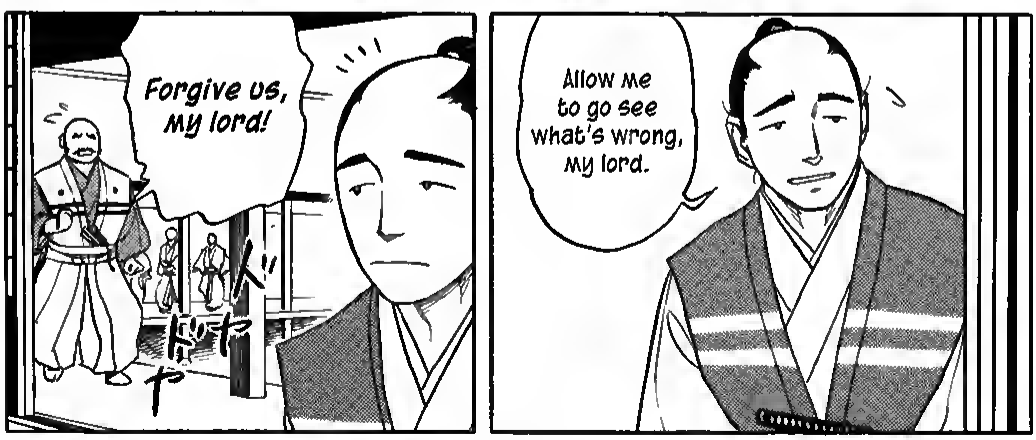
Resolve?


Kenshin was never one to think of any battle half-heartedly.

We all saw for ourselves during Sekigahara, did we not?
Such high levels of discipline is naturally expected! After all, the fates of countless soldiers and retainers hinge upon the orders of their lord.
He truly was the god of war...
Yoshinobu is still young. You must not hold back in correcting him if you see any flaws.
Ah— My apologies...
No need, I do not mind the comment.
Yes...


Hm? Where are the others?

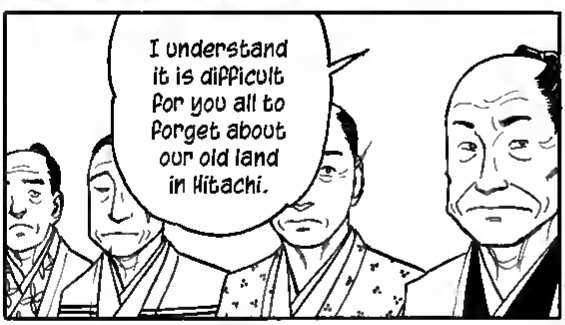
I can hardly believe this audacity to be late!
Oh god...

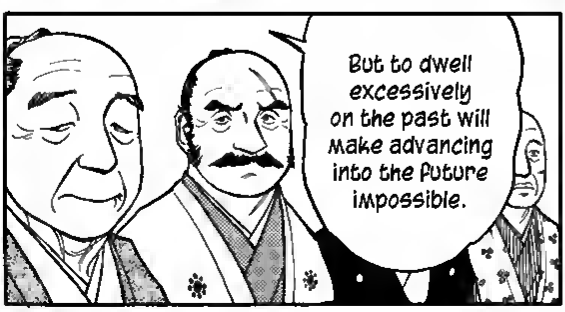

Forgive us, My lord!
Allow me to go see what's wrong, My lord.

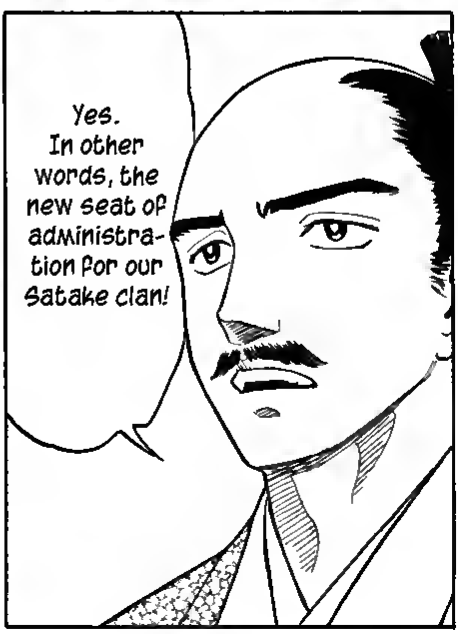
The blame lies solely with me!
No, forgive him!
No, no, you're not the—
Kawai! How can the karō of all people be late!?
You wouldn't mind forgiving them on my behalf,
Would you?
The fault is truly mine for dragging out this conversation by accident.
If that's the case, of course not, father.
Whew...

The "seat" in our new fief.
We shall decide,

The "seat?"

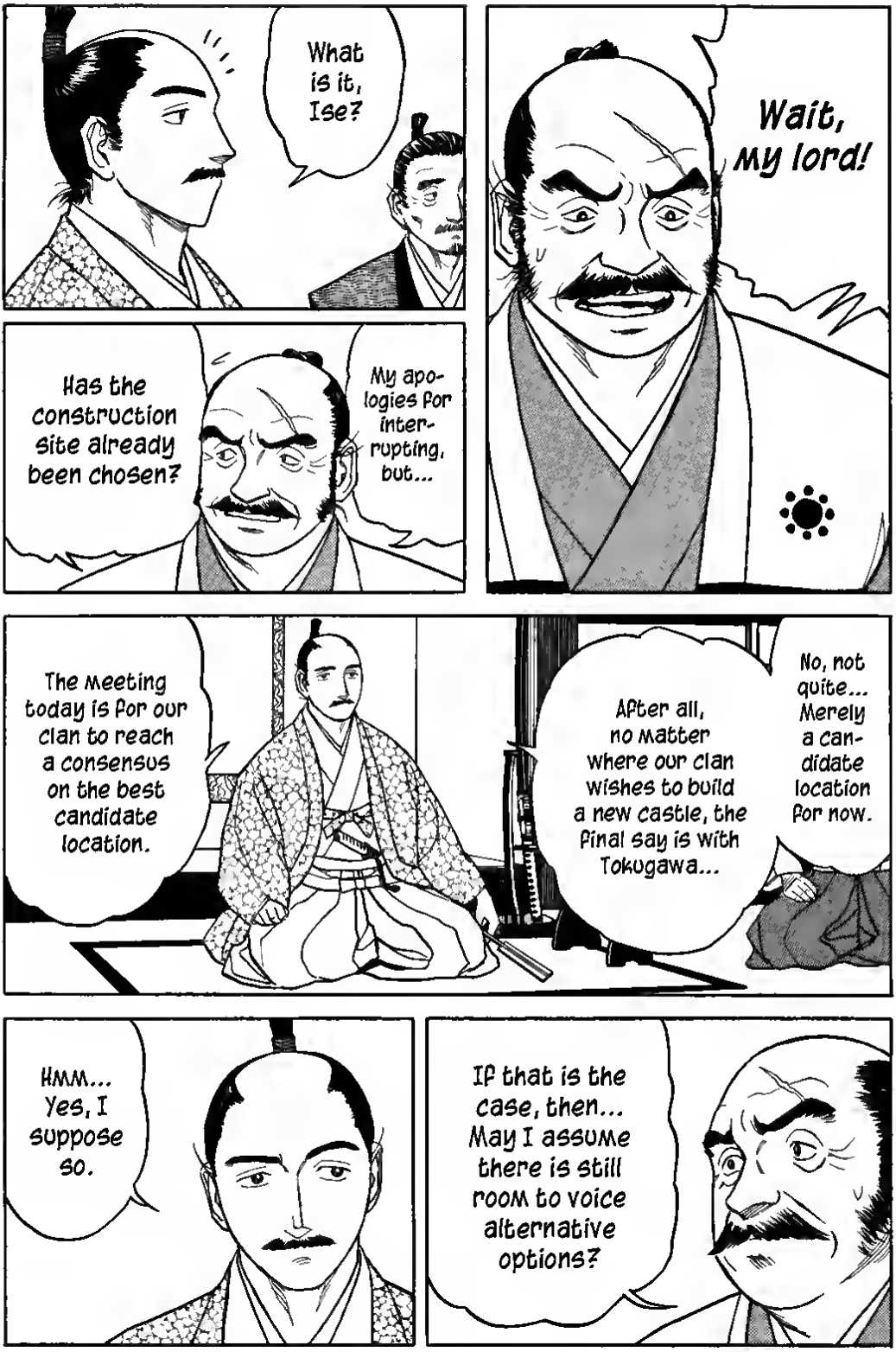

I understand it is difficult for you all to forget about our old land in Hitachi.


But to dwell excessively on the past will make advancing into the future impossible.

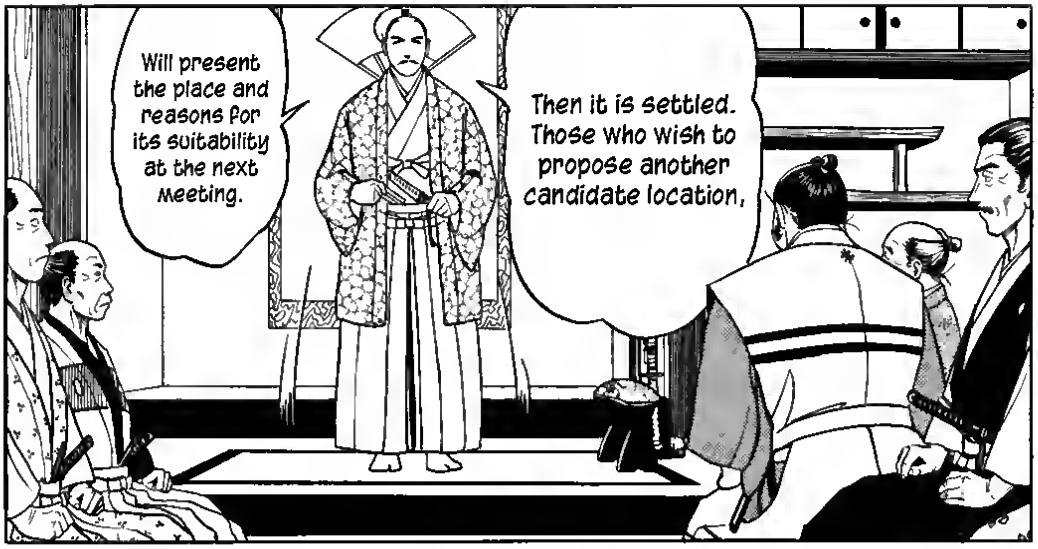

Yes. In other words, the new seat of administration for our Satake clan!

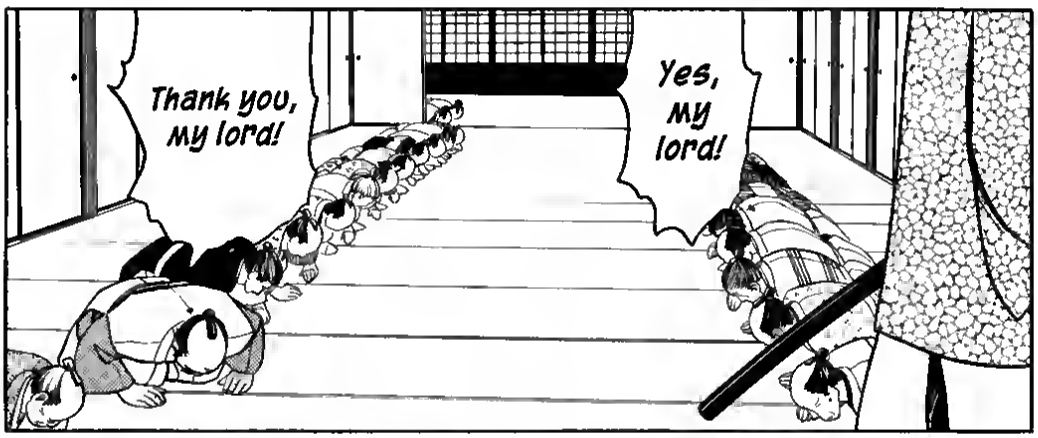
Let us begin anew in this new land!
So let us begin anew in our hearts and minds!
Hope you may lend me your assis-tance!
For this task, I, Yoshinobu,
A new capital for our clan!
Yes, a new capital!
Yes, my lord!
Ohhhh!

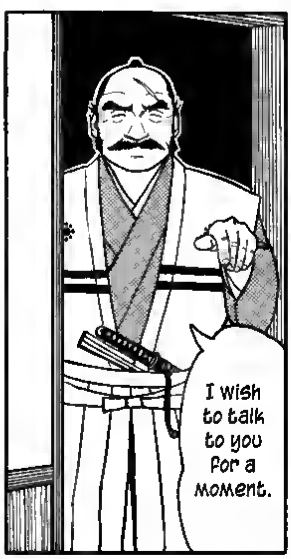
Now, on that topic...
...
Let us do our best!
Splendid!
I've already been eyeing a certain place.
The location for that seat... That is to say, a place to build our new main castle...
Naizen again, huh...
After having Shibue Naizen personally survey the place, I'm convinced there is no better place to construct our castle.
Yes, my lord.
Naizen.
So let us first begin with a description of the said location.


What is it, Ise?
Wait, my lord!
Has the construction site already been chosen?
My apologies for interrupting, but...
The meeting today is for our clan to reach a consensus on the best candidate location.
After all, no matter where our clan wishes to build a new castle, the final say is with Tokugawa...
No, not quite... Merely a candidate location for now.
Hmm... Yes, I suppose so.
If that is the case, then... May I assume there is still room to voice alternative options?

Just now, my lord wished us to lend our assistance...
The matter of where to build the new capital for our clan is not to be taken lightly nor rushed!
Thus, I humbly request my lord to allow us to bear the responsibility of choosing a candidate location!
I concur! I would be thrilled to offer my wisdom, meager though it may be, for this momentous decision for our clan.
Do you not agree?
Y... Yes...
This new province for our clan, small though it may be compared to Hitachi, is still a vast region.
Please allow us retainers to help scout every inch of it so that the best possible construction location can be ascertained!
Hmm... Yes, you bring up a sound point, Ise.
It would be unwise to rely solely upon my poor decision-making abilities.
N-No, I... I n-never meant to imply any such—


Will present the place and reasons for its suitability at the next meeting.
Then it is settled. Those who wish to propose another candidate location,


Thank you, my lord!
Yes, my lord!

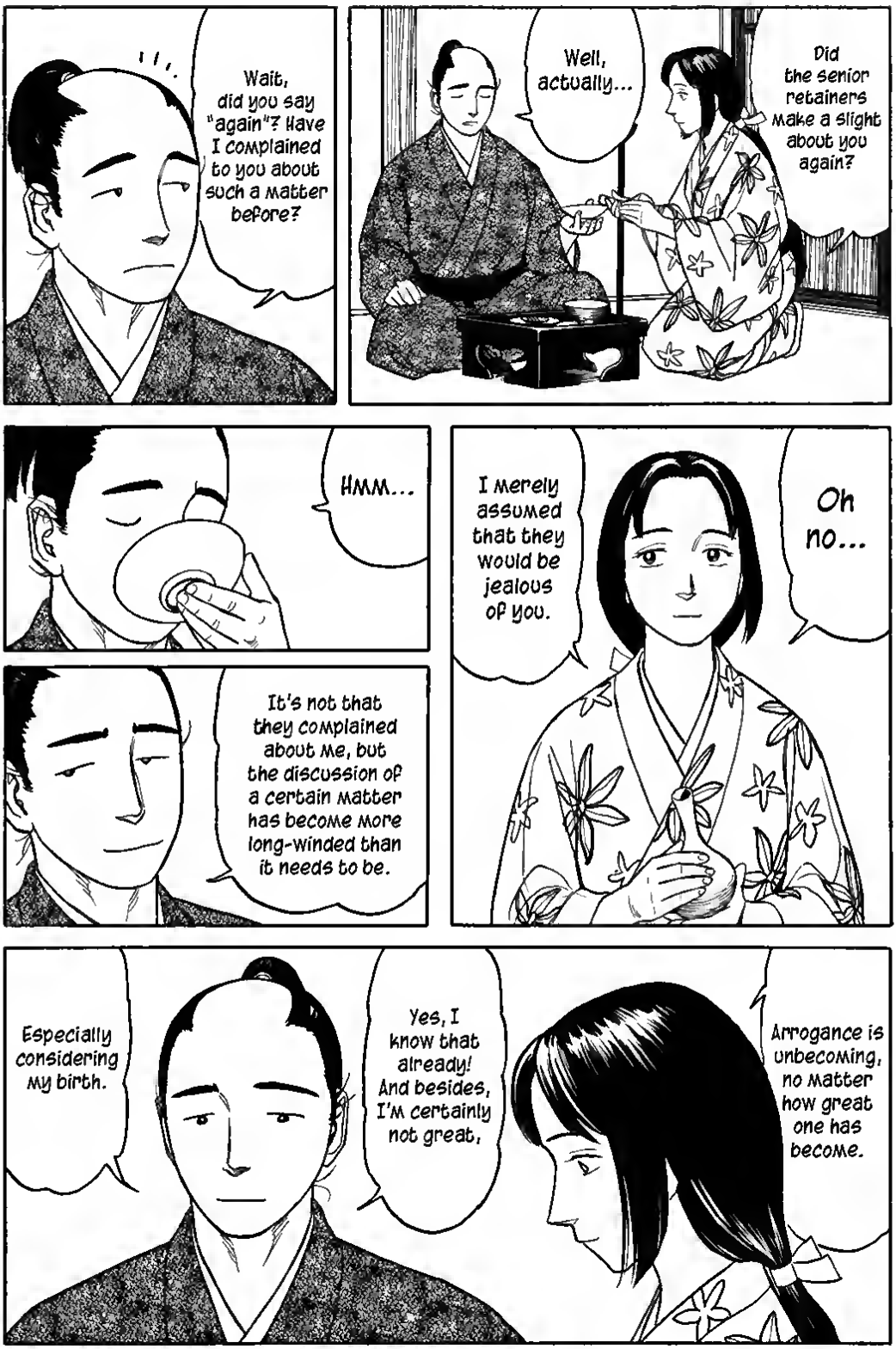

I wish to talk to you for a moment.

Kajiwara.

It didn't even occur to our lord to seek advice from his chief retainers from the beginning! Lately, he only ever seeks advice from that callow Shibue Naizen or the equally young Umezu brothers before deciding on a matter!
Are you not frustrated!?
It seems we old-timers are gradually losing our place...
Nonetheless, he consented to your proposal for the time being, did he not?
Yes, for the time being!
Is that how you feel?
It was his stubborn insistence to side with the Western army that brought down our clan, was it not!?
Although we should consider our clan fortunate for still even having a fief, the whole reason we're in our current situation was due to our lord's disinclination to listen to our opinions!
Well, that is inevitable...
Yes, I know!

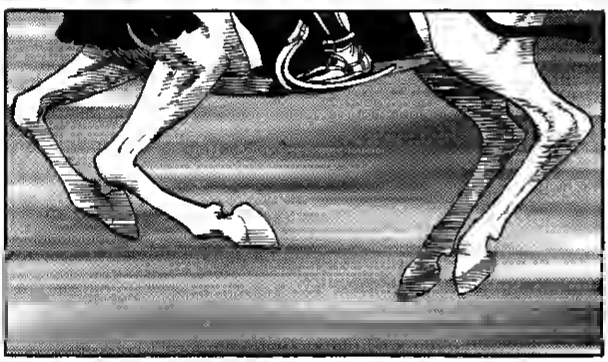
This is hardly my own unique opinion! You of all people can surely sympathize!
B-But!
Your voice is too loud.
I believe the two of us should offer a candidate location at the next meeting.
Now then,
See!?
Well... Perhaps a little.
Hmm.... It is important for our whole clan to debate this vital matter with the utmost seriousness,
But...
...
Not only that, we will propose a location even more ideal than the one our lord and Naizen are set upon!
I want to use this opportunity to show our lord that we old-timers still have much to offer him, such as our wealth of experience, honed by years on the battlefield.

That Naizen is quite the sharp young lad.
If our lord and Naizen already discussed the matter and agreed on the location, then it most likely is indeed the best possible location.
So to find an even better location would be...
Yes, about that, Mino...
That is why I hope I can count on the sagacity of our clan's great military strategist!
Please, I beg of you!
What!?
Welcome home.
Mmhmm.
What a day...

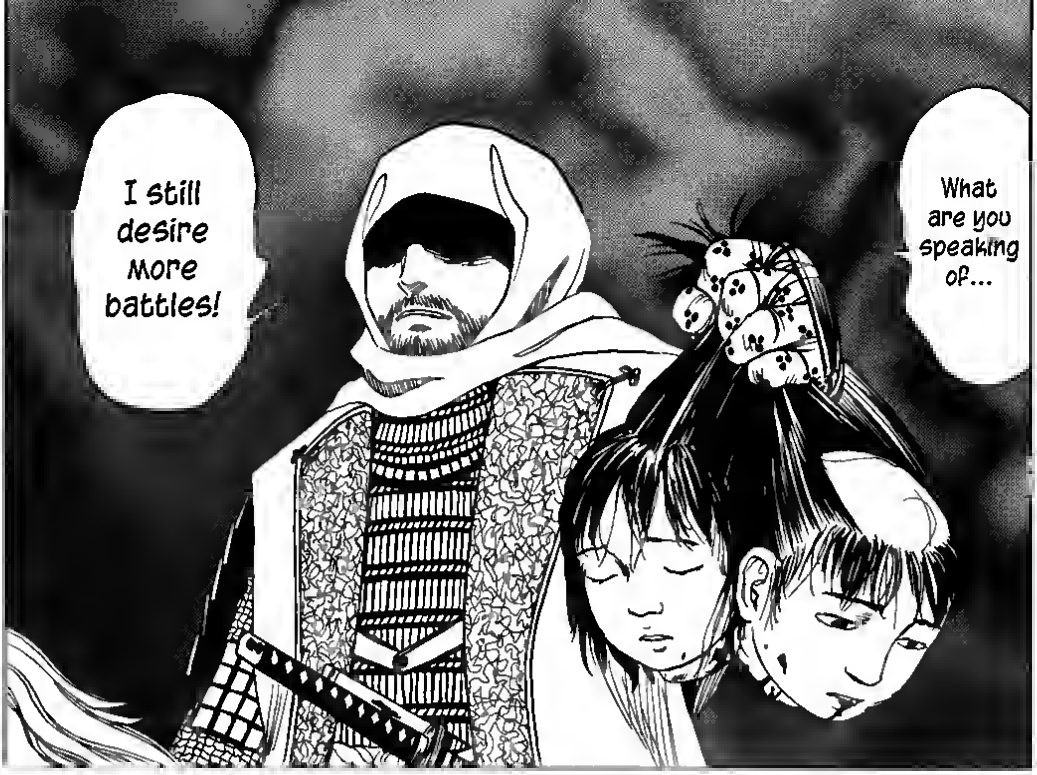

Wait, did you say "again"? Have I complained to you about such a matter before?
Well, actually...
Did the senior retainers make a slight about you again?
HMM...
It's not that they complained about me, but the discussion of a certain matter has become more long-winded than it needs to be.
I merely assumed that they would be jealous of you.
Oh no...
Especially considering my birth.
Yes, I know that already! And besides, I'm certainly not great.
Arrogance is unbecoming, no matter how great one has become.

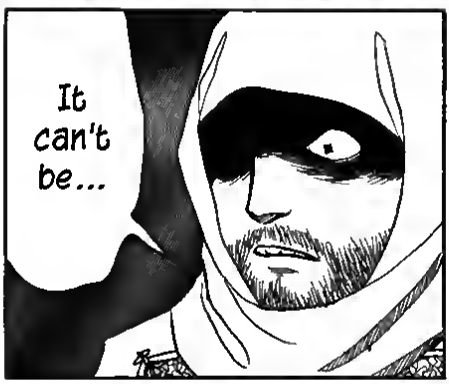
Let any man with a location to state his opinions now.

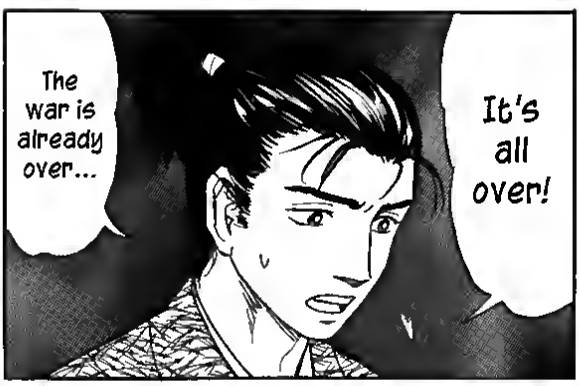
Chapter 2: Eyes of a Falcon



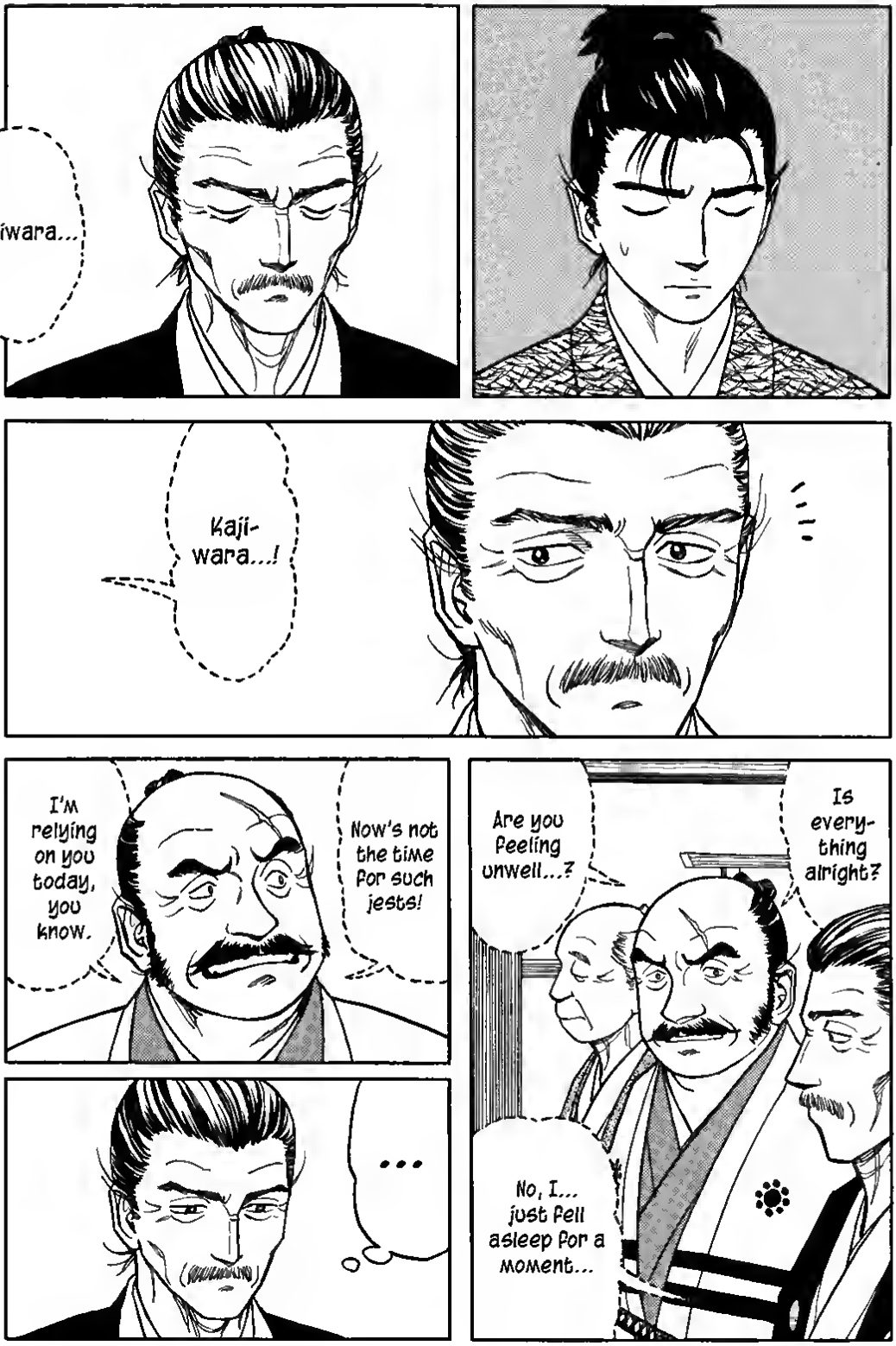
Ah, Genta!
...It's over.
My apologies for keeping you waiting for so long. Lead the way to the battle-field at once!
The war is over.
Pardon?

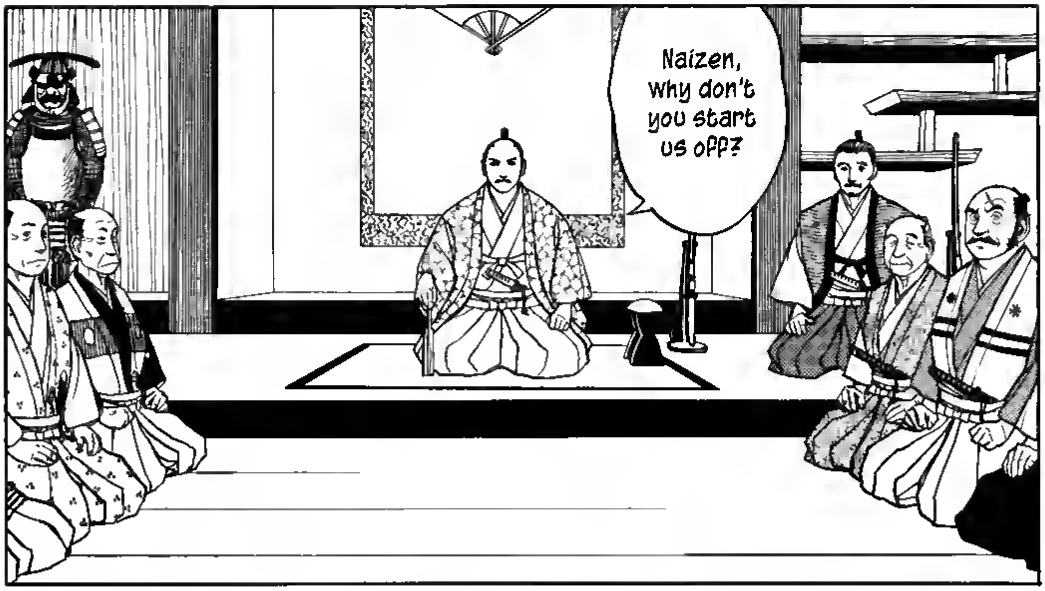

I still desire more battles!
What are you speaking of...

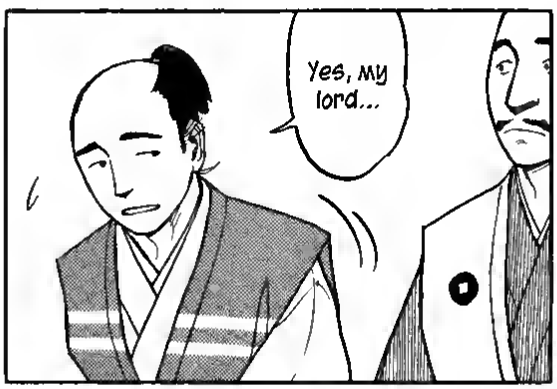

It can't be...


The war is already over...
It's all over!

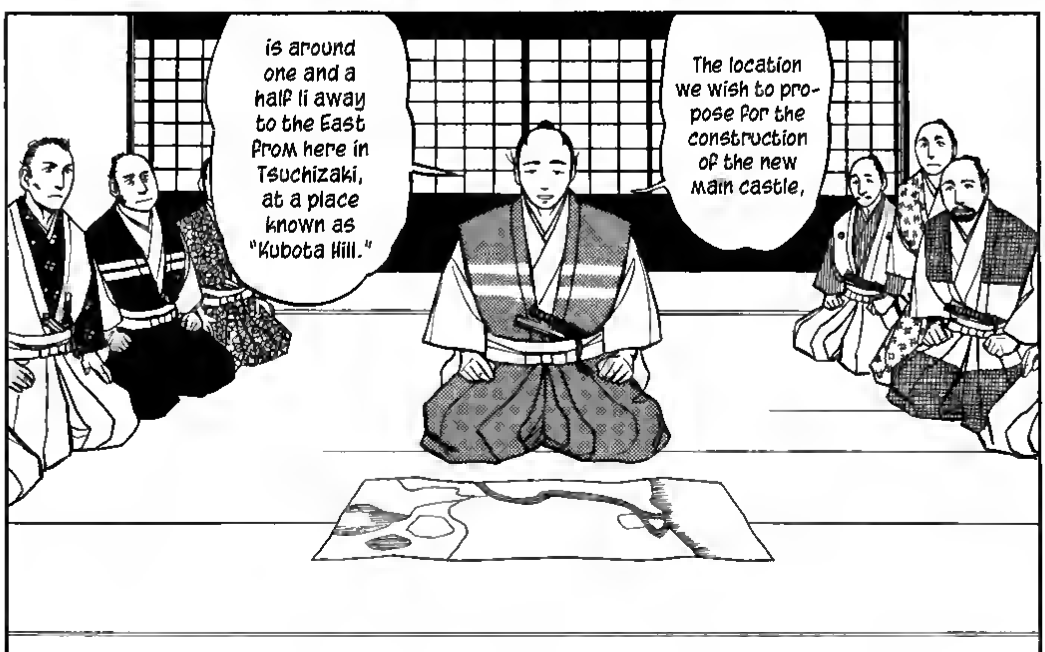
Not after I finally crossed the snow ridge...
Not after I...

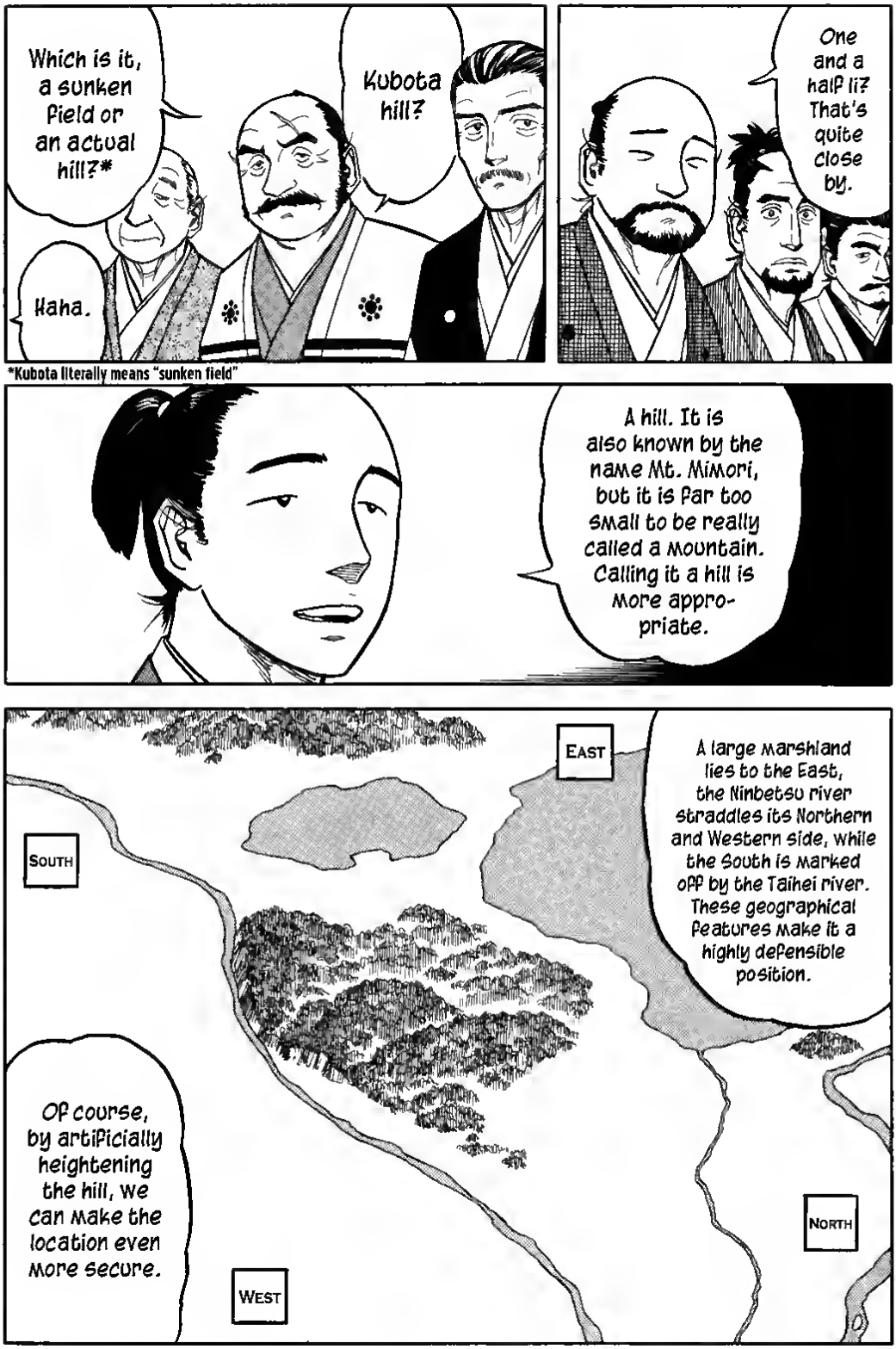

Kajiwara...
Kaji-
wara...!
I'm relying on you today, you know.
Now's not the time for such jests!
...
Are you feeling unwell...?
Is every-thing alright?
No, I... just fell asleep for a moment...

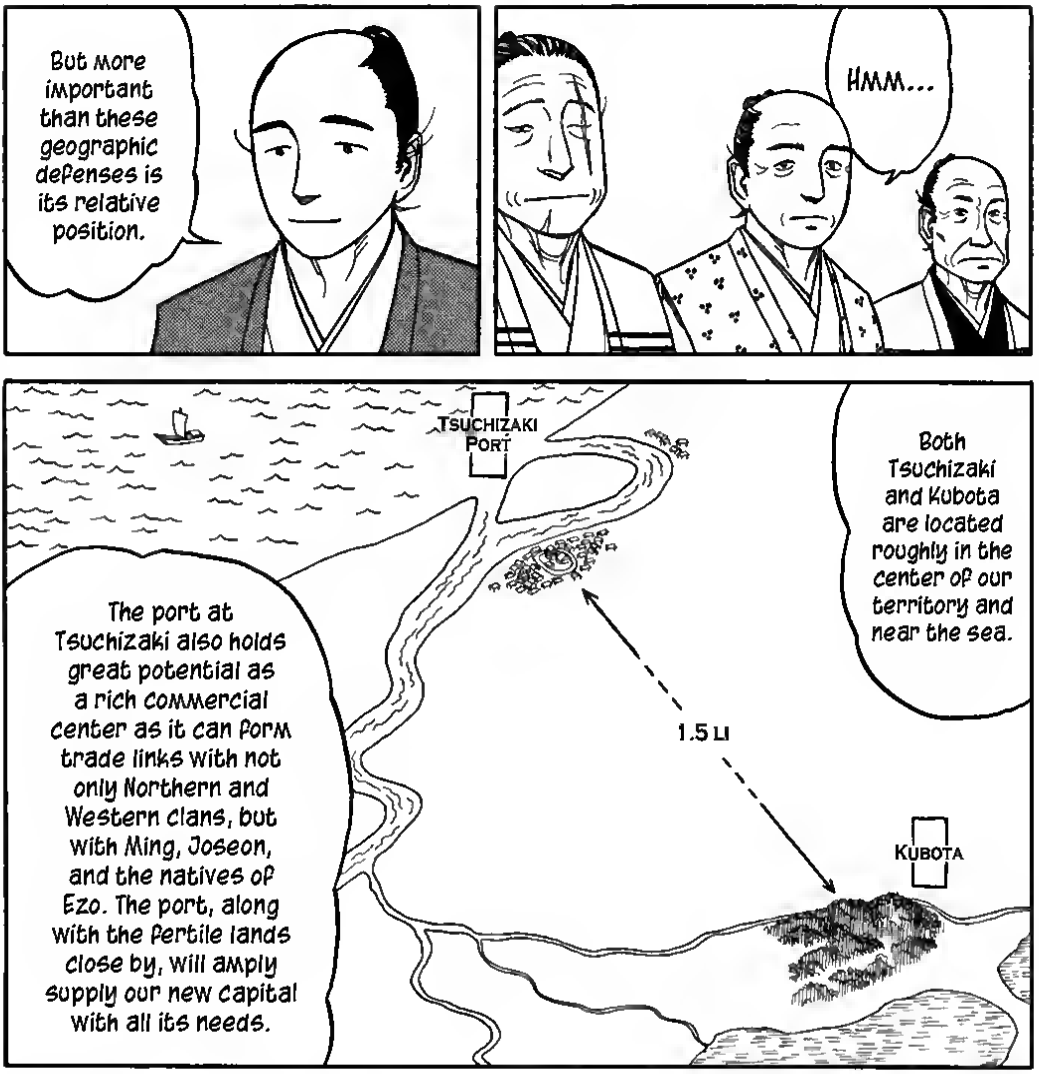

Naizen, why don't you start us off?


Yes, my lord...

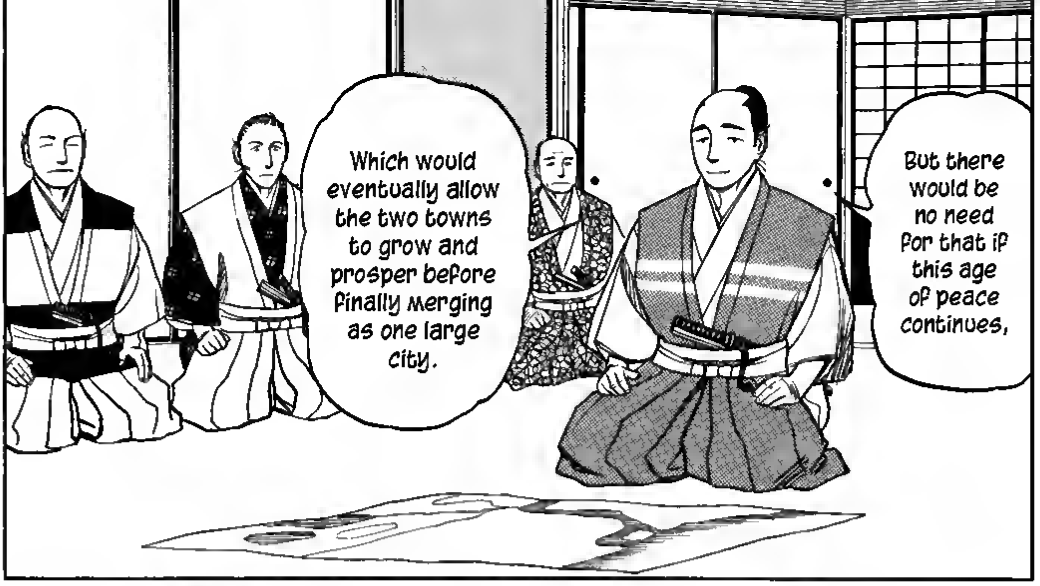
Tell them of our proposal.

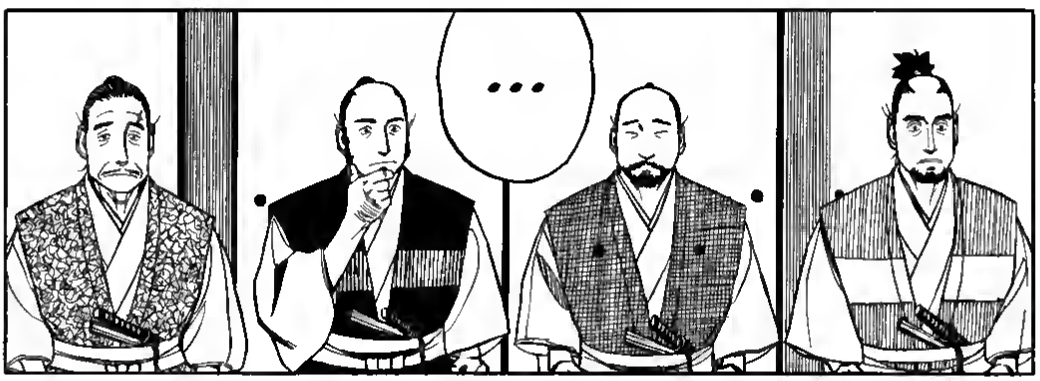

is around one and a half li away to the East from here in Tsuchizaki, at a place known as "Kubota Hill."
The location we wish to propose for the construction of the new main castle,

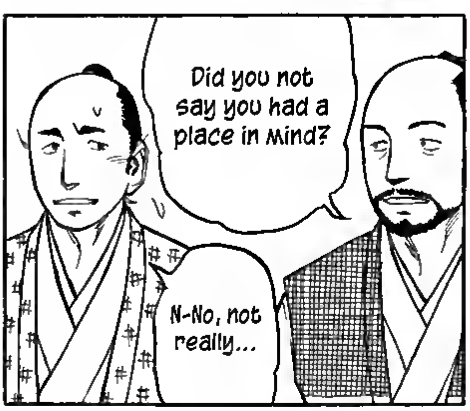

Which is it, a sunken field or an actual hill?*
Kubota hill?
Haha.
One and a half li? That's quite close by.
*Kubota literally means "sunken field"
A hill. It is also known by the name Mt. Mimori, but it is far too small to be really called a mountain. Calling it a hill is more appropriate.
EAST
SOUTH
A large marshland lies to the East, the Ninbetsu river straddles its Northern and Western side, while the South is marked off by the Taihei river. These geographical features make it a highly defensible position.
Of course, by artificially heightening the hill, we can make the location even more secure.
NORTH
WEST

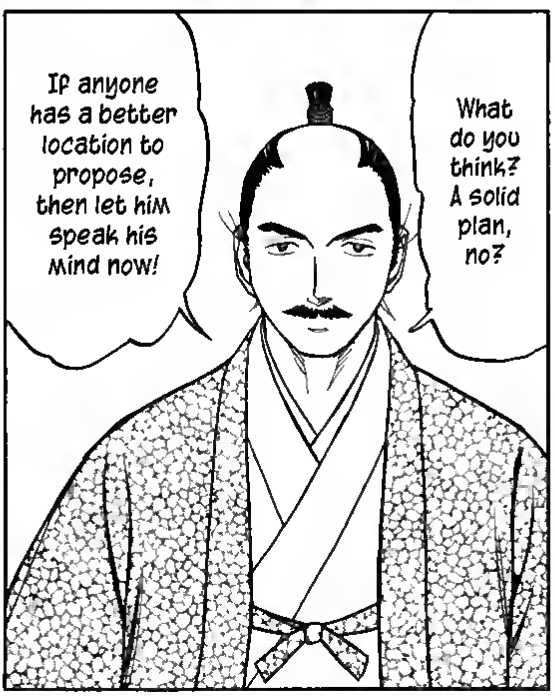

But more important than these geographic defenses is its relative position.
HMM...
TSUCHIZAKI PORT
Both Tsuchizaki and Kubota are located roughly in the center of our territory and near the sea.
The port at Tsuchizaki also holds great potential as a rich commercial center as it can form trade links with not only Northern and Western clans, but with Ming, Joseon, and the natives of Ezo. The port, along with the fertile lands close by, will amply supply our new capital with all its needs.
1.5 LI
KUBOTA
Not only that, both this castle and the port town are susceptible to damage from possible river floods and tsunami.
The castle and the port town here are located on low lands near the sea level which juts out to the river mouth. Any enlarging would mean expanding towards inland, but we would then need considerable manpower to dig out a large amount of moats in order to secure defenses.
If that's the case, why not just enlarge our current castle here at Tsuchizaki-port?

Yes, yes...
That is why it is best to build our new castle a little further inland from the coast.
Two towns with distinct functions... By situating them close together but not too close, one will complement the other without negatively hindering either's growth, ensuring the development of a prosperous center for our province!
The castle town and port town will then be separated by a small distance of one and a half li.
Ohh...
And along the roads connecting the two towns, there will be temples whose respective villages can help transport and store supplies in times of war, as well as serve as places to gather troops and new recruits before setting off on a campaign.

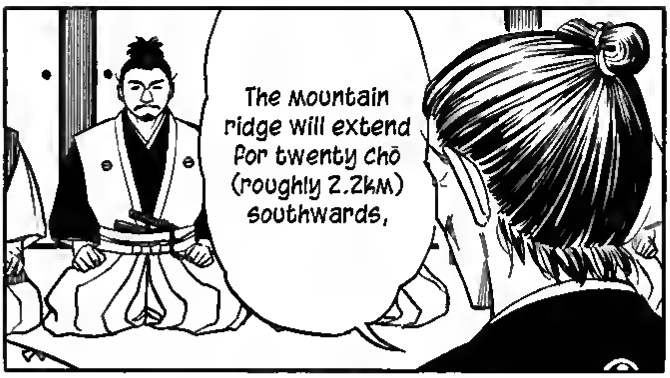

But there would be no need for that if this age of peace continues,
Which would eventually allow the two towns to grow and prosper before finally merging as one large city.


...


Did you not say you had a place in mind?
N-No, not really...

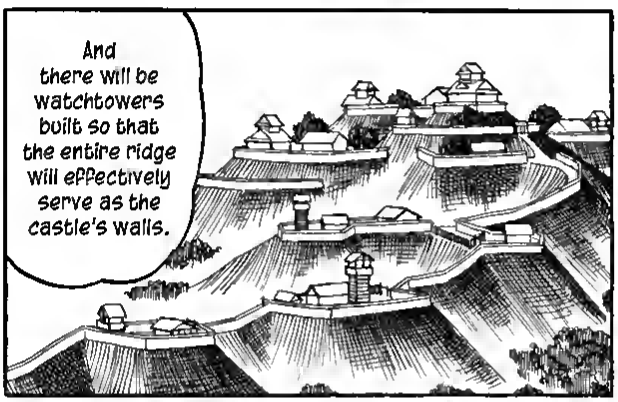

What do you think? A solid plan, no?
If anyone has a better location to propose, then let him speak his mind now!

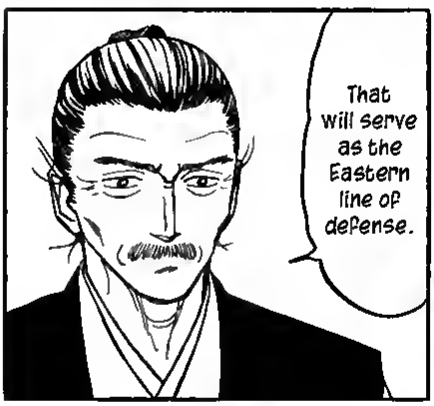
Yes, go ahead, Kajiwara.
May I then speak?
Kane-zawa, you say?
Yes, my lord!
I would like to propose the Kanezawa castle at Senboku be rebuilt to our purposes to serve as our clan's new main castle.
But I propose we turn the entire mountain into a new castle worthy of our clan.
Kanezawa may be a small castle built on a mountaintop at Senboku, roughly 30 jō high (roughly 90M)...

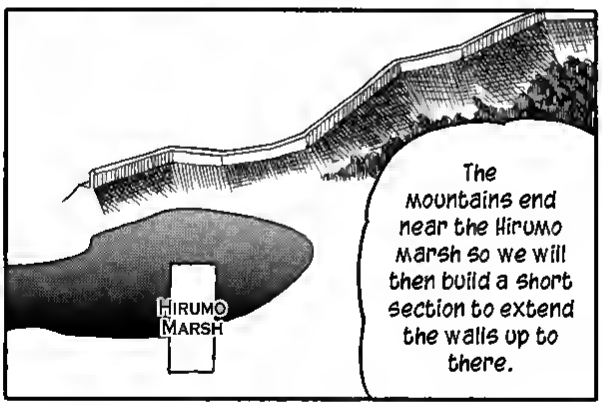

The mountain ridge will extend for twenty chō (roughly 2.2km) southwards,

Yes!

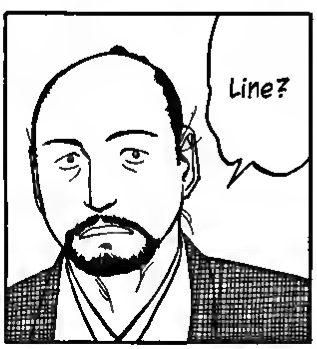
Hm?


And there will be watchtowers built so that the entire ridge will effectively serve as the castle's walls.

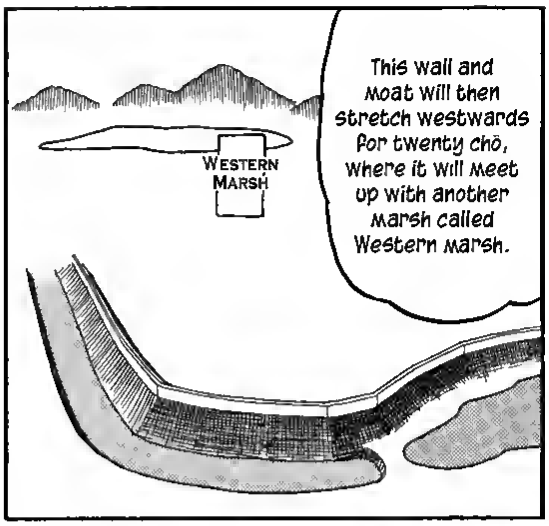

That will serve as the Eastern line of defense.

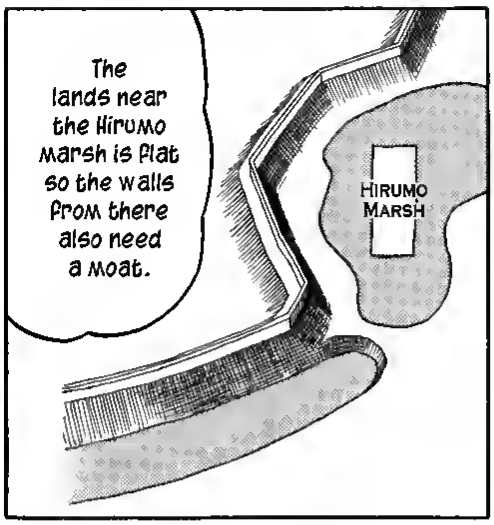

Hirumo Marsh
The mountains end near the Hirumo Marsh so we will then build a short section to extend the walls up to there.

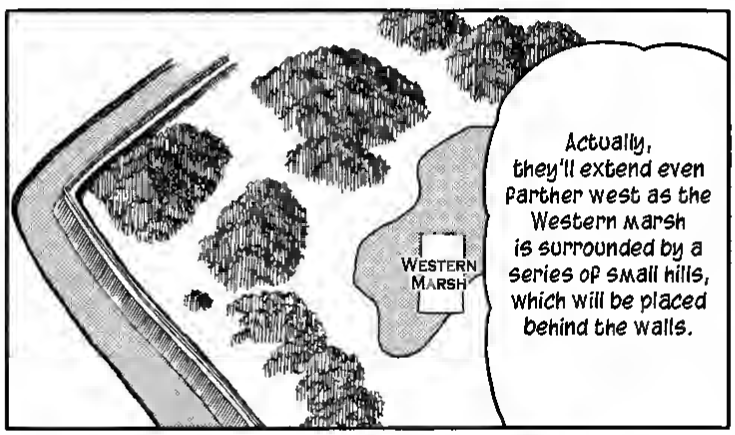
A defensive rampart stretching for over twenty chō!?

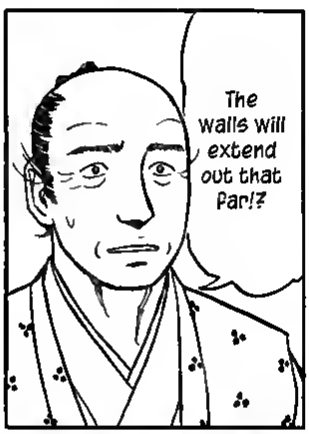

Line?

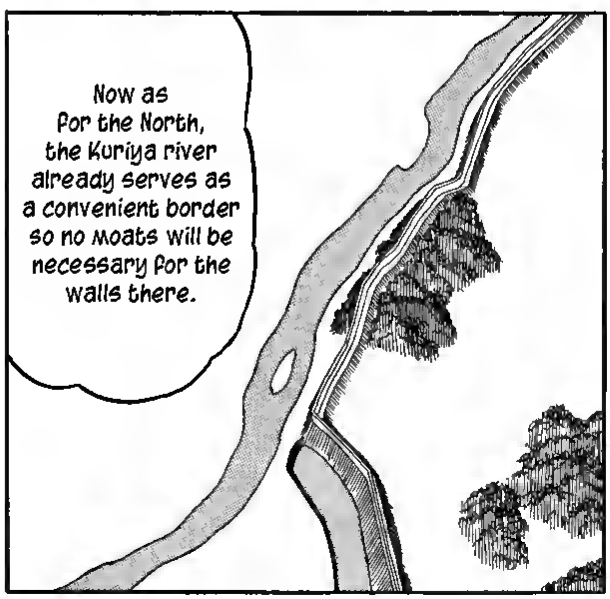
East?

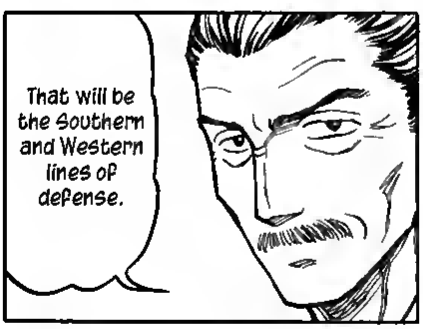

Western Marsh
This wall and moat will then stretch westwards for twenty chō, where it will meet up with another marsh called Western Marsh.


The lands near the Hirumo Marsh is flat so the walls from there also need a moat.
Hirumo Marsh

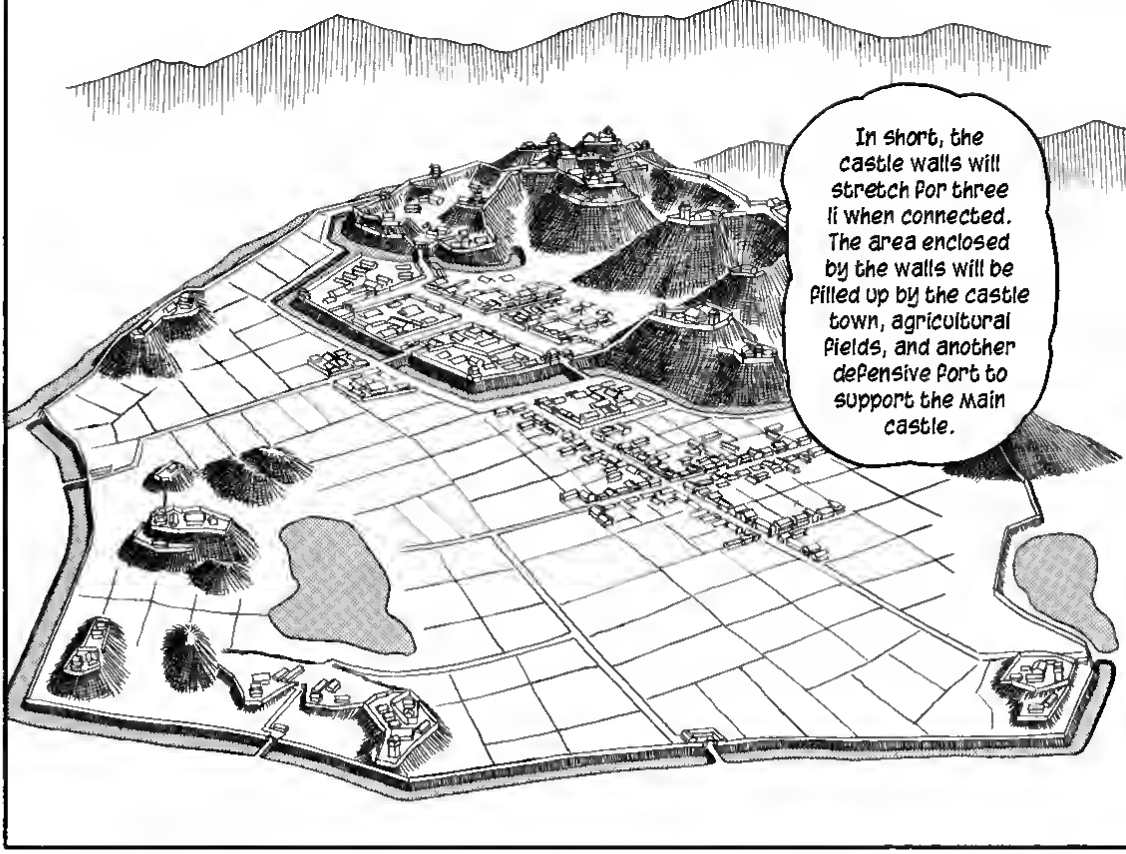

Western Marsh
Actually, they'll extend even farther west as the Western marsh is surrounded by a series of small hills, which will be placed behind the walls.


The walls will extend out that far!?


Now as for the North, the Kuriya river already serves as a convenient border so no moats will be necessary for the walls there.


That will be the Southern and Western lines of defense.

This is enormous...


In short, the castle walls will stretch for three li when connected. The area enclosed by the walls will be filled up by the castle town, agricultural fields, and another defensive fort to support the main castle.

A length of three li...? Is that not a little too big?

In other words, it is a proposal for a "castle-province" of sorts.
That is the prime objective for the scale of my proposal.
I do not believe so. Admittedly, the construction for this undertaking might not be fully complete even during the reign of my lord's successor, but this castle can surely survive for years and years even if tens of thousands of enemy troops were to try and lay siege.

For such a castle, Senboku is the best possible location!
A province inside another province?
A capital here can surely secure the entire province indefinitely!
As home to the most productive farmlands in our clan's entire domain, it is the ideal foundation.
And any grain outside the walls can be burned without much worry!
For instance, the bulk of our province's crops can be easily stocked inside the castle grounds in the case of an invasion,
Exactly!
Ohh...

Thus, I believe securing our province's safety is a higher priority than securing commercial interests.
However, the Toyotomi household still controls Osaka, and one cannot know if the realm might undergo violent upheaval once more.
If this age of peace really is to continue, then focusing on commerce would indeed be better for the prosperity of our clan's province.
HMM... Yes, good point.
Is he serious?
Might undergo violent upheaval?
Senboku is connected by the river so its grains can be easily shipped by boat, no?
The port here is fine and all, but the surrounding farmlands are rather meager.
Yes, they cannot even be compared to the fertile fields in Senboku.

True, Senboku is one region we must bring under our firm control first.
You must not assume that Senboku's grains will always be shipped without problems!
My lord! There are still many powerful families here in this province who are not so pleased at having our clan as their new overlords!
Instead, their hearts resonated with Kajiwara Mino's proposal of building a solid foundation for military-might, with which to project to the entire province and thereby secure it.
The senior vassals, whose lives had been shaped by endless wars of the previous era, were not easily swayed by Shibue Naizen's plans which focused on forming trade links.
HMM...
What do you think, Naizen?

Hmm.
Furthermore, it is unwise to show Tokugawa signs of any formidable military-might which he may deem a threat.
I have to admit I do not believe the realm will undergo another chaotic upheaval.
And about the costs for your incredible plan... May we have an estimate?
Nonetheless, construction projects for the security of a domain is done with forced, unpaid labour.
Haha ha!
I'm a military strategist. The abacus is no friend of mine.
...
Then again, perhaps it's a natural consequence of your origins...
Well, aren't you quite attentive to trivial concerns? And you call yourself a warrior?
Even so, the labourers must be provided with something to eat.

Ah, of course! The Gosannnen War (Later Three-year war)!
...By the way, the Kanezawa castle was once known as Kanezawa-no-Saku, back when it was the setting of a famous incident.
It happened over five hundred years ago.
What event was that?
Hmm?
Ahh, of course!
And in that war, the two brothers who captured Kanezawa Port were the legendary Hachimantarō Yoshiie,
To think there was such a history there!
And Shinra Saburō Yoshimitsu, the founder of our Satake clan!

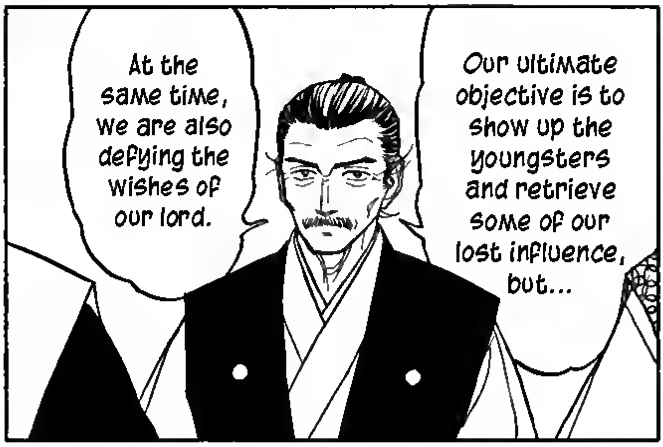
I'm not one to dwell too much on fate or destiny, but after our setback during Sekigahara's aftermath, it is fitting for our clan to begin anew in the very place that the founder of our clan started out by conquering.
The choice must be Kanezawa!
Yes, I would like to begin there with the roots our founder originally laid out!
Yes, how appropriate!
Mn...
Yes, it must!
Please choose Kanezawa!
Please, my lord!

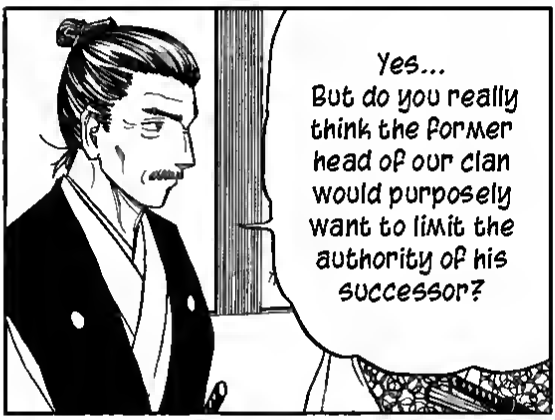
Pardon me... but may I have a turn to speak?
Can a decision not be reached today?
Well, I believe it is almost time for today's meeting to end.
I lost my chance to speak up earlier when the debate suddenly took quite a stimulating turn.
I would like to make a proposal of my own.
Pardon...?
Please go ahead, Ôtono.
M-My apologies.
...
That being said, the hour is already late so I shall simply state the location for today and give my reasons at the next meeting.
Ahem...

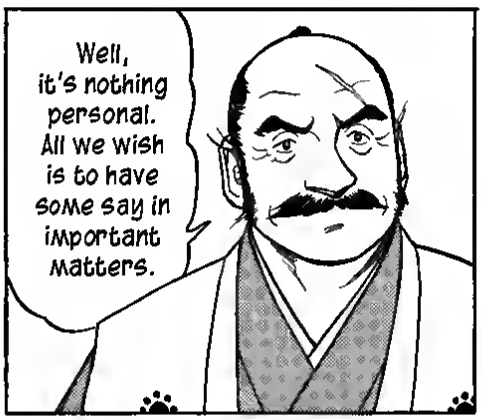
Having fertile farmland is crucial, after all...
Near Kanezawa is another castle called Yokote castle. My proposal is to re-build Yokote into our new main castle, for reasons which largely coincide with Kajiwara's line of logic.
T-Then let us continue the debate in the next meeting.
...
I could not be more pleased at how the meeting went today! You truly are a sage, Kajiwara!
Hahaha!

If your proposal passes, then this will surely put those youngsters back in their place and have our lord reconsider his decision-making process!
You even had Naizen stumped!
Yes. In essence, we've practically gained a powerful supporter on our side.
Still, he said he chose that location for reasons largely the same as Kajiwara's did he not? So it makes no real difference.
I must admit, though, I was taken aback by the sudden proposal from the Ōtono himself.
Hmm?
I wonder about that...

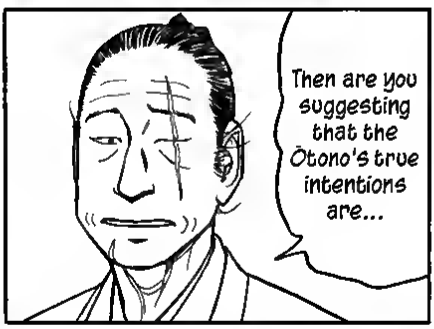
Or to put it in harsher terms, we are weakening our lord's authority over his own clan.

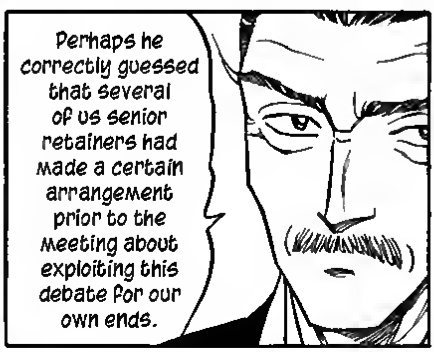

At the same time, we are also defying the wishes of our lord.
Our ultimate objective is to show up the youngsters and retrieve some of our lost influence, but...


Yes... But do you really think the former head of our clan would purposely want to limit the authority of his successor?


Well, it's nothing personal. All we wish is to have some say in important matters.

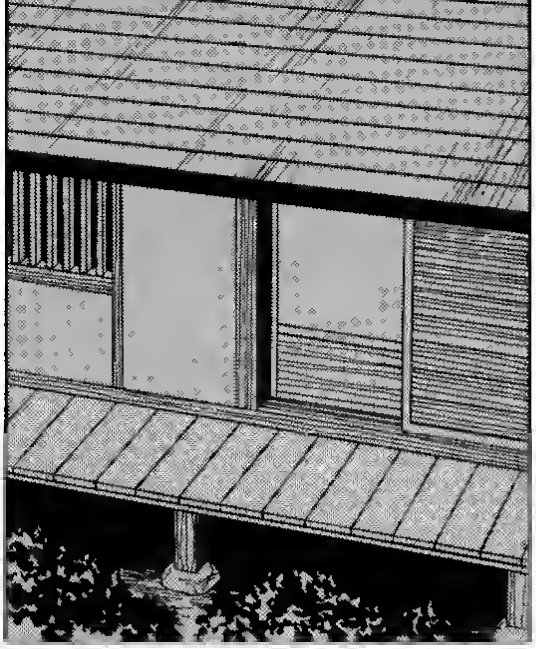
Only to withdraw it at the final moment and then say that upon further thought, Naizen's proposal is best.
Thus, he interfered by suggesting a proposal similar to ours. He could then use his influence to sway the other retainers to supporting his proposal,
It can't be...


Then are you suggesting that the Ōtono's true intentions are...


Perhaps he correctly guessed that several of us senior retainers had made a certain arrangement prior to the meeting about exploiting this debate for our own ends.

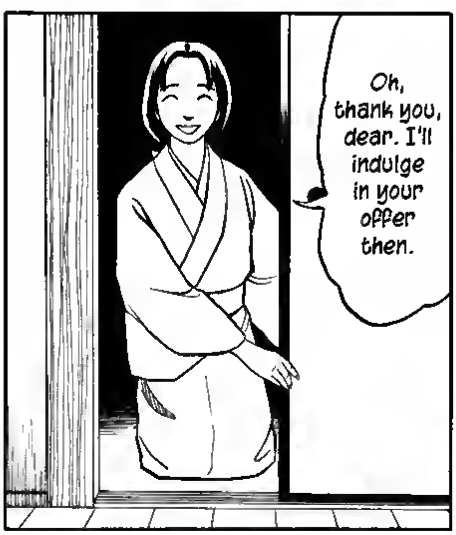
Blood is thicker than water, as the old adage goes... Do not expect the Ōtono to be on our side simply because he is from our generation. He is most likely supporting his own son and successor.
What would the Ōtono have to gain by siding with us retainers?
Yes... I have to hand it to the Ōtono... To think he would bring up Yokote out of all places... Even I overlooked that site.
Hmm... Our former lord, once called a demon on the battlefield, sure has changed...
Then perhaps we should formulate some sort of plan just in case...
...?

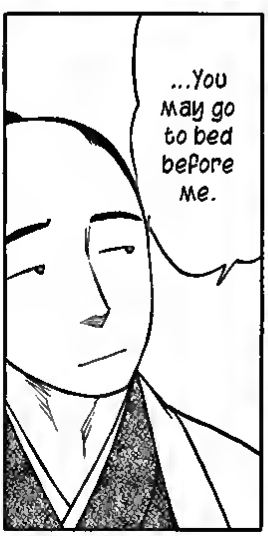
Yaaawwn... Are you still awake?



I'll calculate once before going to bed.
And then check over my calculations in the morning.

Yes, I need to make some quantifiable data by tonight.


Oh, thank you, dear. I'll indulge in your offer then.


...You may go to bed before me.

Oh, this is too complicated for me!

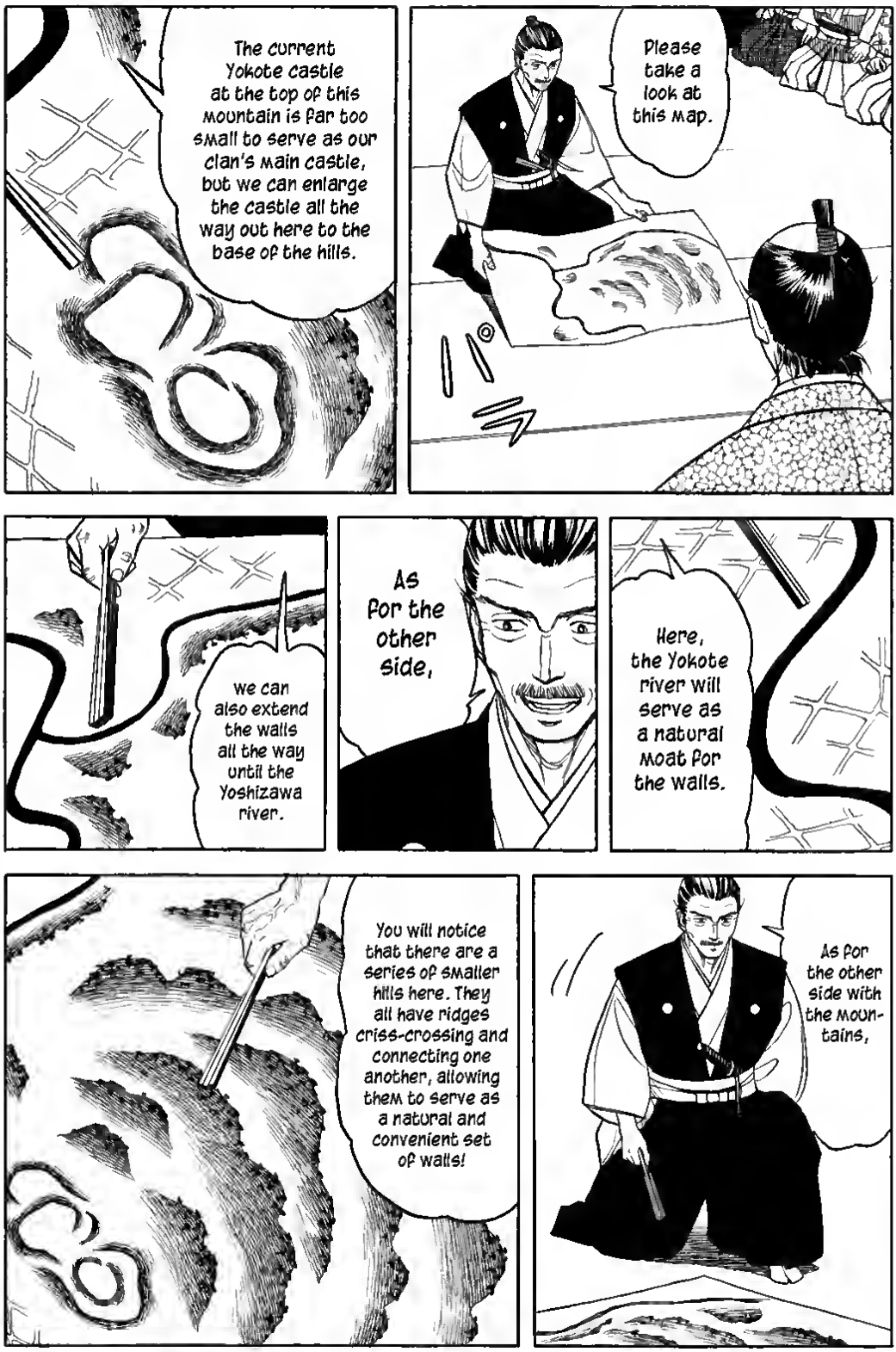
Hmm... If this many labourers were to work for this many years... And the warehouse can store this much food and supplies... Huh? Ugh... this is so hard to calculate!
Still, I've got to churn out some estimate figures to make a proper case...
The land survey for our domain isn't complete yet, so I can't say with any absolute certainty, but... I have a strong feeling Kajiwara's proposal will bankrupt our clan.
It's a good thing the Ōtono interrupted when he did... He sure saved us back then, which must have been his intention...
Not only that, I'd have to explain it in a way that even men with only war on their minds can understand...
Alright, then! Gotta keep working!

Morning... Hanemon... Shume...
Naizen?
Morning, Naizen.
Hee... hee...
Ha... haha... Don't worry... I've got it all figured out...
You look unwell. Did you get proper sleep?
Naizen, is there really any need for you to be so nice to those stubborn old-timers by taking the time and effort to explain everything?
...
I'll make it cryyyystal cleeeeaaar why Kanezawa's impossible! Even a hundred years wouldn't be enough to build such a thing...

No... I actually requested our lord to refrain from doing so.
Exactly!
After all, the Kubota proposal was originally our lord's own idea, so a single word from him should be enough to silence any dissent.
If this matter is also settled so one-sidedly without giving a fair chance to other opinions, then it may irreparably sour the relationship between our lord and all his retainers.
What!?
Another Sekigahara, huh...

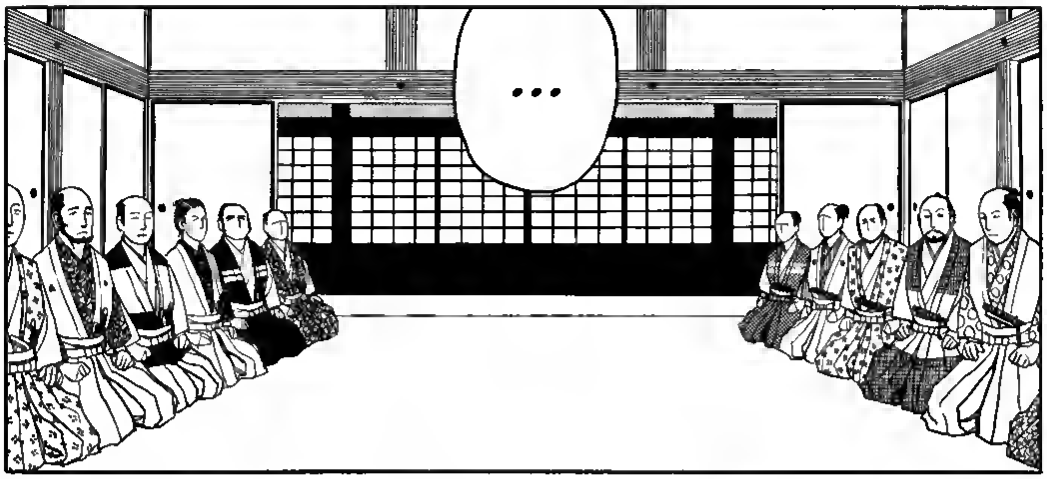
The locations proposed thus far are Kubota, Kanezawa, and Yokote...
Let us continue the debate on possible locations to build the new main castle.
I wish to officially withdraw my Kanezawa proposal!
Before the debate officially begins,
Please allow me to interrupt!
Yes?
Hee hee...
What!?
What!?

Absolutely! My proposal cannot be left on the table when another location, superior to mine in every way, has been proposed!
But Kajiwara, many retainers were quite enthusiastic about your proposal last time. Is there really a need to withdraw it now?
Hmm...?
I am awed by your deep insight and wisdom!
Ōtono!
As Shibue Naizen feared, building the castle at Kanezawa would consume far too much time and resources.
What!? Is that really true!?
On the other hand, Yokote already has the perfect topography to serve as a large castle!


The current Yokote castle at the top of this mountain is far too small to serve as our clan's main castle, but we can enlarge the castle all the way out here to the base of the hills.
Please take a look at this map.
we can also extend the walls all the way until the Yoshizawa river.
As for the other side,
Here, the Yokote river will serve as a natural moat for the walls.
You will notice that there are a series of smaller hills here. They all have ridges criss-crossing and connecting one another, allowing them to serve as a natural and convenient set of walls!
As for the other side with the mountains,

Thus I withdraw my Kanezawa proposal,
And earnestly give my support to the Ôtono's proposal!
Ahahaha! Could there be a more convenient wall than this?
And depending on our clan's needs and resources, we can choose which ridges to build upon, making the walls along the mountainside as big or as small as want!
A splendid proposal, Ôtono!
I as well!
I support the Ôtono's proposal as well!
...
I really hadn't thought about any of that...
No, I...
Your wisdom truly knows no bounds!

Pardon?
Cannot be built purely upon military theories!
A state!
The war is already...
The age of war is over!
Or to fortify a secure location in expectancy of war...
To capitalize on the prosperity of peace time...
...
It's either Kubota or Yokote...
So in short,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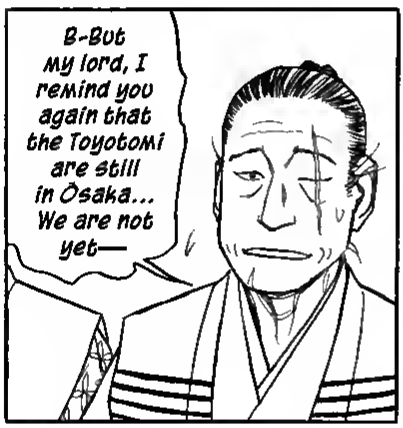
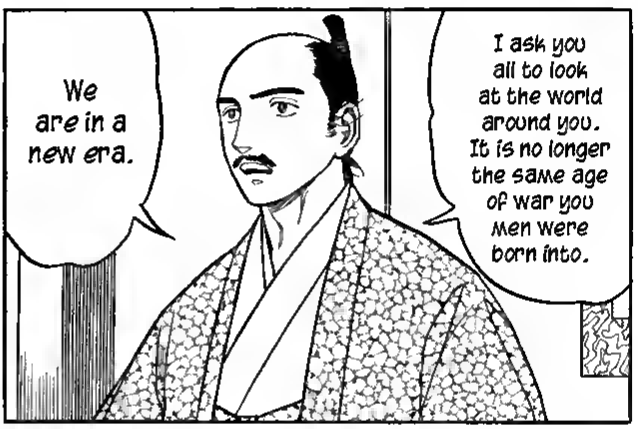
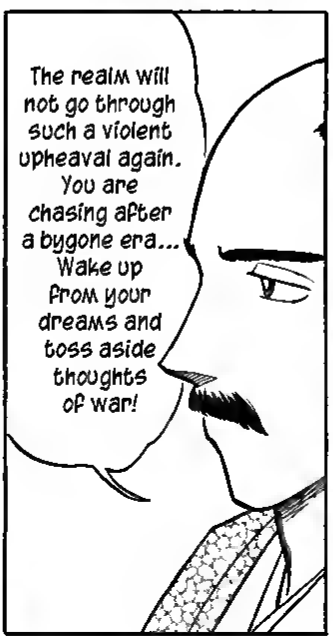
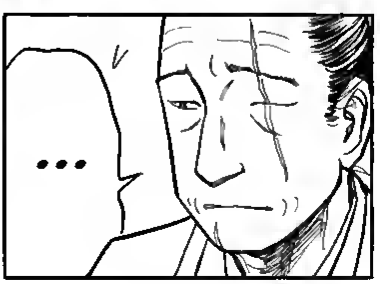

B-But my lord, I remind you again that the Toyotomi are still in Ôsaka... We are not yet—


We are in a new era.
I ask you all to look at the world around you. It is no longer the same age of war you men were born into.

Toss aside thoughts of war...? But war is all that we learned and all that we can do... What are we to do from now on...?


The realm will not go through such a violent upheaval again. You are chasing after a bygone era... Wake up from your dreams and toss aside thoughts of war!

Not yet what?


...

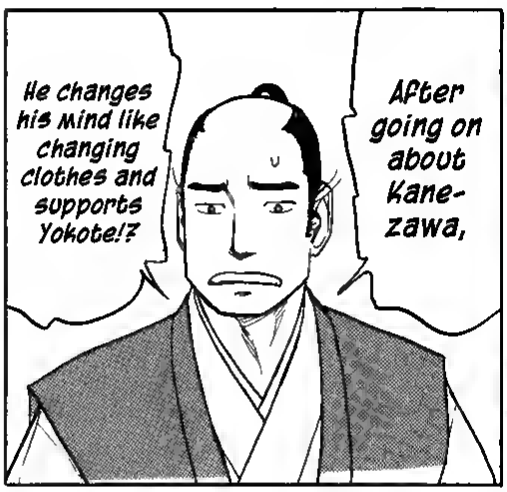
K-
Kajiwara...!
Even if my lord orders us, the fact remains we are warriors and can never be merchants.
You...
Mino...
Let us now choose which is the better location. The one in the West or East...?
Ah, don't get me wrong. This is no final vote.
Why don't we raise hands to see who supports which, Kubota or Yokote...
Well then,
...
Merely a way for us to gauge what the general consensus of the Satake clan is at the moment.
It is...

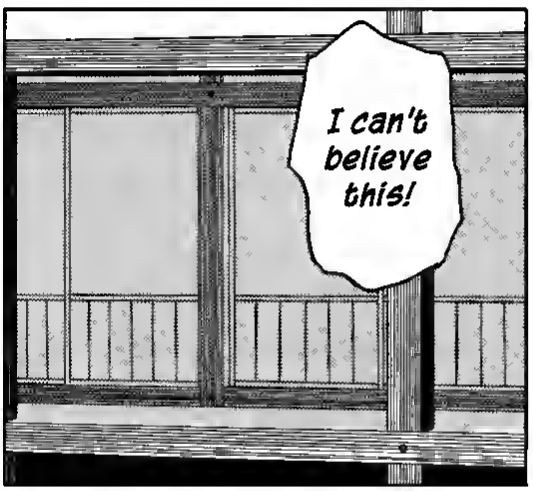
All in favour of Kubota?
All in favour of Yokote?
...
I have not made up my mind.
Hm? What about you, Wada?

My lord!
My lord!
Father! I have something to discuss with you afterwards!
All of us here,
Are working for the sake of the Satake clan!
I beg of you to reach a decision before your senior retainers!
Please, My lord! Considering the importance of this matter,

With so many opinions offered, it is possible that my lord may find some disagreeable.
However!
We will follow your orders until the very end no matter what!
And we will obey!
The final say lies with you, Satake Yoshinobu, our lord and the clan-head!
Nghh...!
Just as we did with the matter of Sekigahara...!

Yokote is confirmed as the site of the Satake clan's new main castle





Yes, they sure are stubborn... Those old survivors of war...
What do they have to gain by defying our lord's wishes to this extent!? I have never heard of retainers stepping over the face of their own lord!

I don't quite understand it myself either.
What do you mean?
There's ... Something inconsistent about their actions...
G-Good afternoon, sir...
!
You really cannot understand, Naizen...?
And you think you can protect our lord like this...?
Well, I...
Chief Karō
Wada Awa-no-Kami

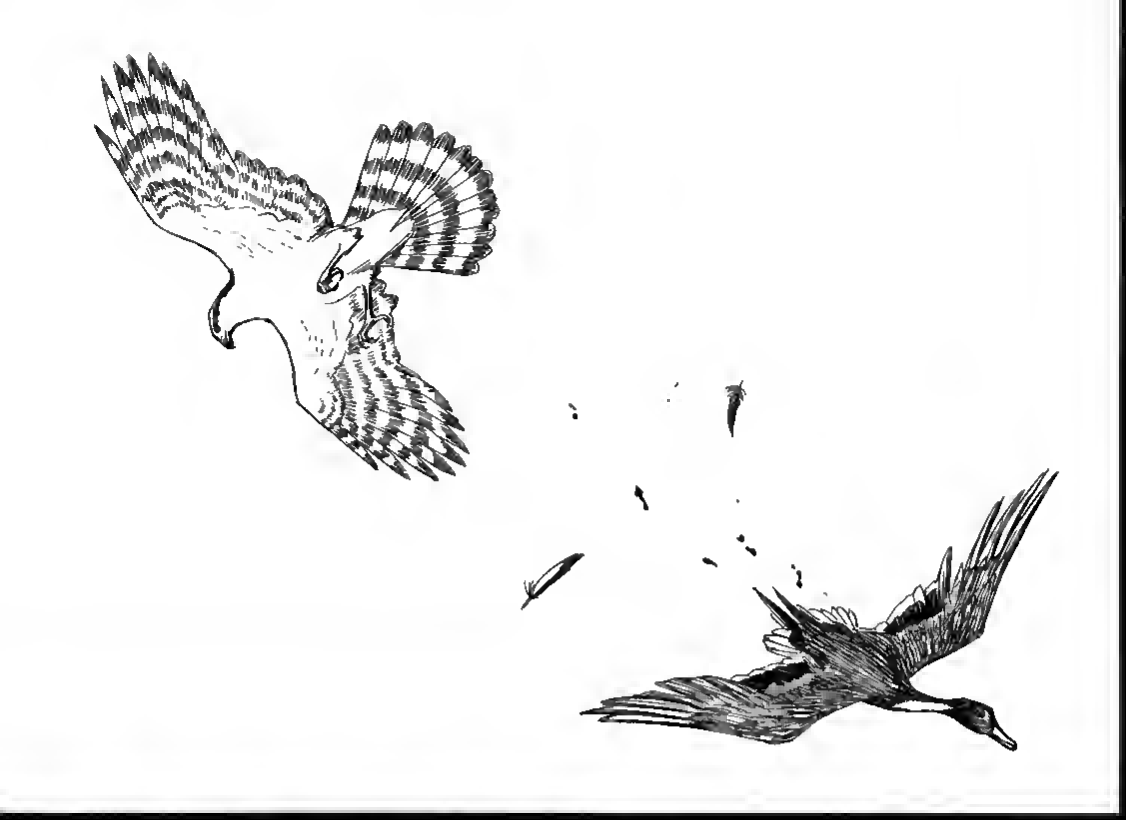
Then it is no wonder you do not understand.
Hm? Yes, sir...
Naizen, do you dislike conflict?
Huh...?
All desire conflict.
The old retainers of our clan,
For the men who've lived all their lives waging war to steal and enlarge their lands, the seething frustration at having their entire lands suddenly seized from them cannot be put into words.
Although our clan sided with the West for Sekigahara, we were not able to participate in the battle itself.
Still, the fact remains that we sided with the losers and thus had our rightful lands seized from us.

Still... Even if that is the case...
And even I cannot simply resign ourselves to our new circum-stances.
Do you understand? They lost their entire lands without even having had the chance to fight! It should then come as no surprise why Kawai, Kajiwara,
War...?
That is why you must make them accept it on their own terms! If you truly wish to silence us old-timers, then you must do it through war! Win over them through war!
You tried to give an explanation, Naizen, but the other retainers were waging war.
Think back to the meeting today.
Ah, then how about we ambush them at night and—
YOU FOOL!

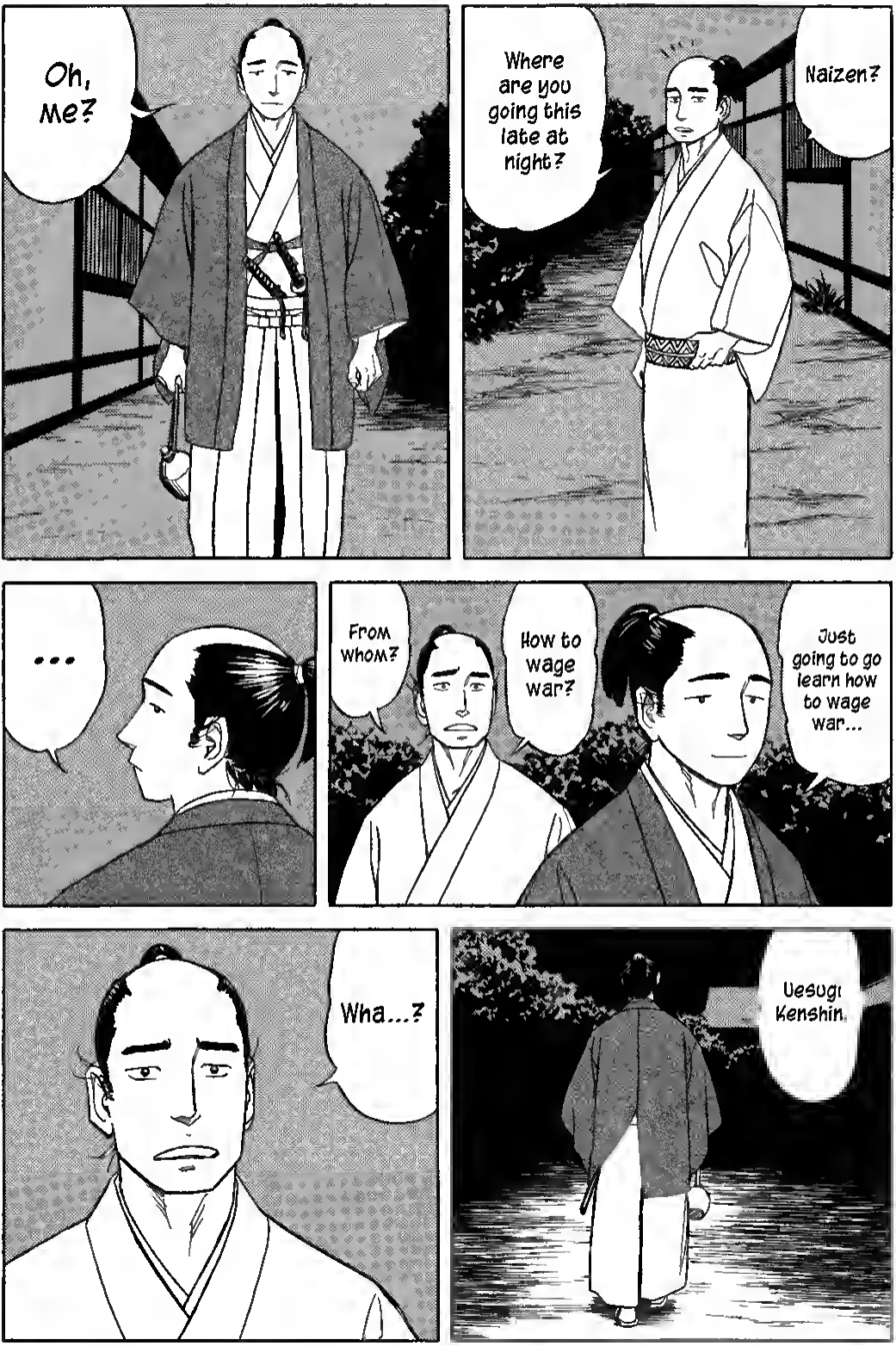
The debate is over. What more can I do...?
But, sir.
...
Oh dear... It seems you haven't the faintest idea about war at all...
Such a tiresome sea...

No, it's much further inland at a place called Yokote.
Where will it be? Close to the sea...?
I hear the location for the new castle was decided.
Yes...
Well, it may be far from the sea, but its farmlands are very fertile.
Ah, well that's very reassuring to hear.
We actually passed by it when we first moved from Hitachi to here.
We did...?
Because you're the expert at surveying farmlands, of course.
Hmm?
But then... You'll soon have very little free time, won't you...

Sur-
veying...
Rice...
Survey,
huh...



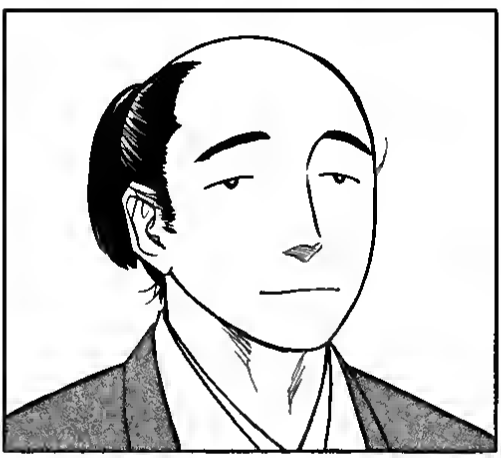
Rice...


Oh, me?
Where are you going this late at night?
Naizen?
...
From whom?
How to wage war?
Just going to go learn how to wage war...
Wha...?
Uesugi Kenshin

But first, come inside.
Well, well, this is quite the unexpected guest... What brings you here?
Excuse me for the intrusion.

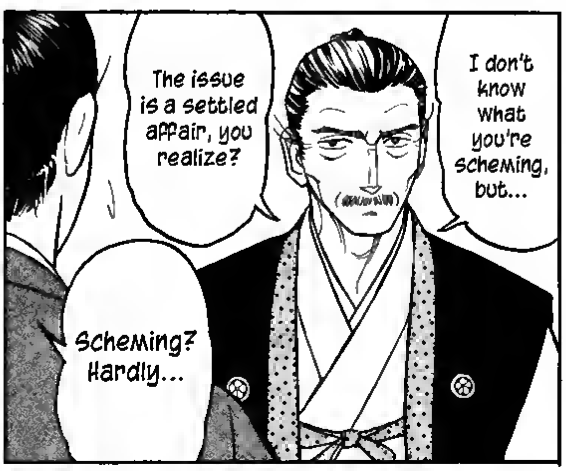
Chapter 3: Correspondence in Winter

Thank you.



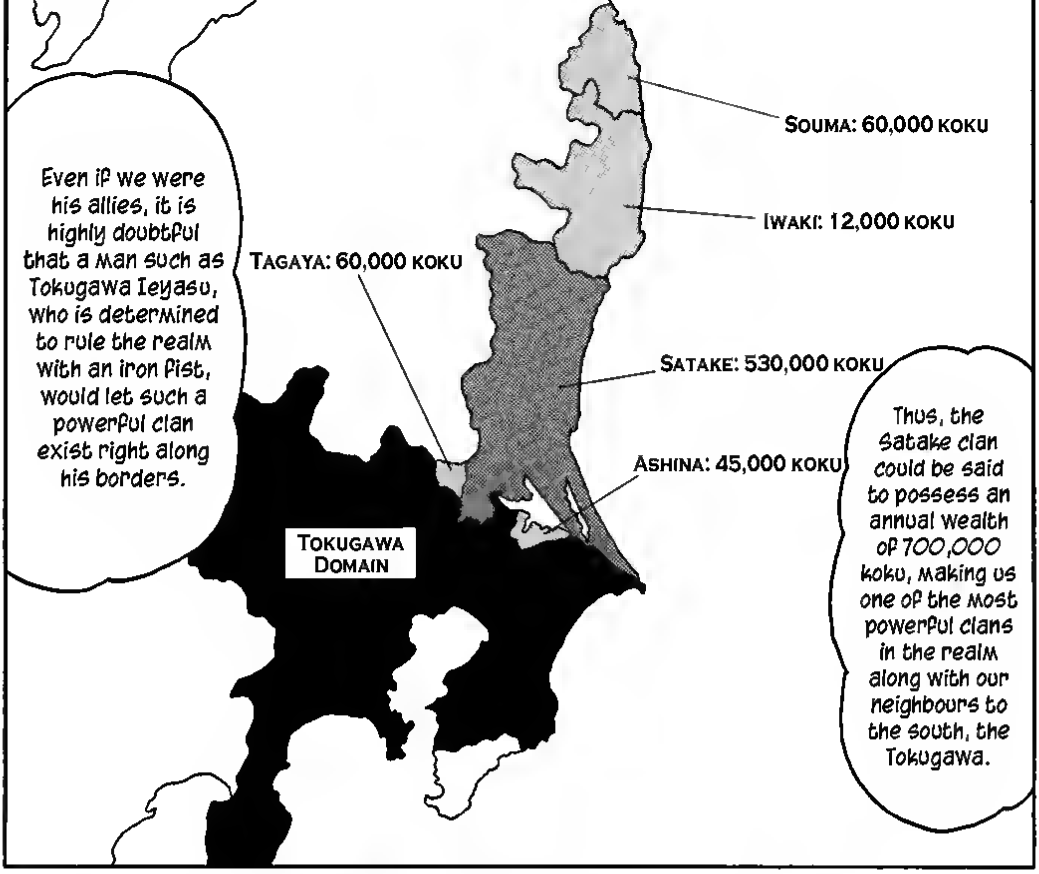
...

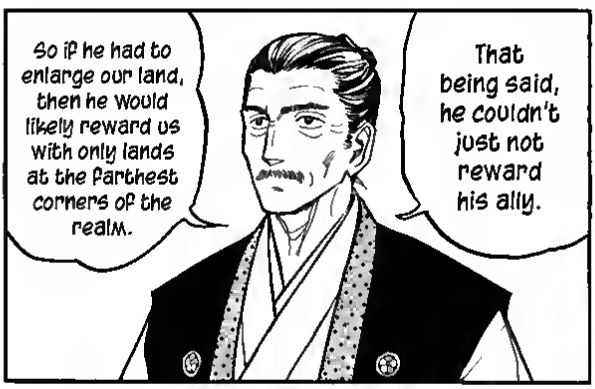
But in my eagerness, I gave you no prior notice for my late visit and I apologize for that.
I wished to learn the ways of war from an esteemed strategist such as yourself,


I don't know what you're scheming, but...
The issue is a settled affair, you realize?
Scheming? Hardly...

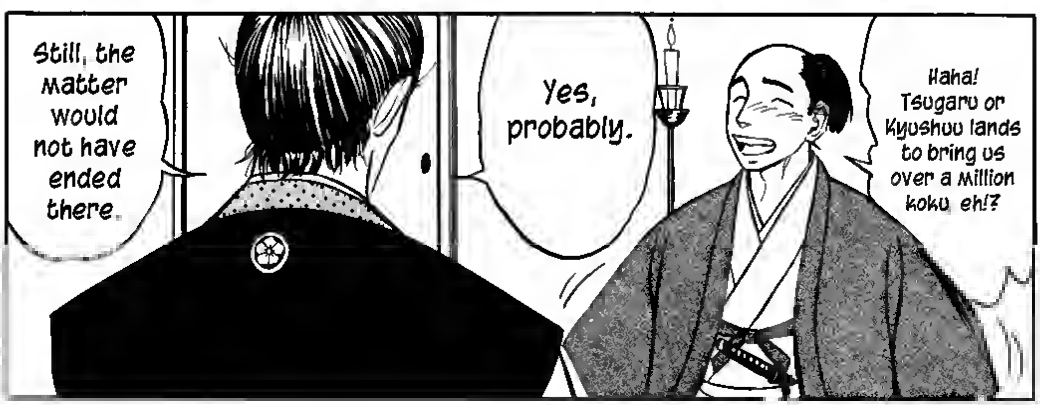
Don't tell me that. It's not as if I myself am not tired of telling the same stories over and over.
Are you doing that again?
...
But please...! Tell me the stories about Uesugi Kenshin as well!
My sincerest apologies, sir!
3
You sure worked him over hard!
Poor Kenshin!
HMM...?
How many times did Kenshin end up crossing the Mikuni ridge...?
ヒソ
So...
HMM... Fourteen or fifteen... But counting the round-trip, it'd be about thirty times, I suppose!

You inquired if our Hitachi domain would be fine if we were to side with the Tokugawa and win...
Hmm... Did I? What was it...?
At the meeting shortly before Sekigahara, you asked a peculiar question.
By the way, Naizen.
Oh, shucks...
Hmm... You have quite the perceptive mind.
Ahhh, yes, yes! That's the matter I wanted to get to the bottom of!
Not only that, the neighbouring clans we shared kinship with were essentially the lower branches of our own clan.
Our old domain had an annual wealth of 530,000 koku.
But... How do you suppose things would have turned out?
It's certainly possible that our clan may have met a more misfortunate end had we sided with the Eastern army.
Oh?


Even if we were his allies, it is highly doubtful that a man such as Tokugawa Ieyasu, who is determined to rule the realm with an iron fist, would let such a powerful clan exist right along his borders.
Souma: 60,000 koku
Iwaki: 12,000 koku
Tagaya: 60,000 koku
Satake: 530,000 koku
Ashina: 45,000 koku
Tokugawa Domain
Thus, the Satake clan could be said to possess an annual wealth of 700,000 koku, making us one of the most powerful clans in the realm along with our neighbours to the south, the Tokugawa.


So if he had to enlarge our land, then he would likely reward us with only lands at the farthest corners of the realm.
That being said, he couldn't just not reward his ally.

Hmm, just as I thought...


Still, the matter would not have ended there.
Yes, probably.
Haha! Tsugaru or Kyushuu lands to bring us over a million koku eh!?

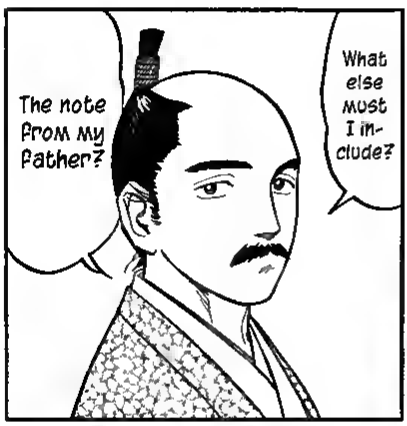
Eventually, he would come to crush us with one reason or another!
It would be far too dangerous for him to have a clan such as ours make over a million koku per year.
Unlike the relatively new Tokugawa, our Satake clan boasts lineage from the Seiwa Genji.
At the very least, it was not an unfortunate mistake.
I would not go so far as to call it the correct choice, but...
Then our lord's decision to side with the West at Sekigahara was...
Ohh...
I am so thrilled!
Thank god...
Ohhh! Kajiwara!

Haha...
...
Thank god...
Thank god I decided to visit tonight!
Forgive me for the late disturbance.
Yes, sir!
Take care.
Urp—
Uweehh!
Hahaha... Whoo...
Sure glad I visited...

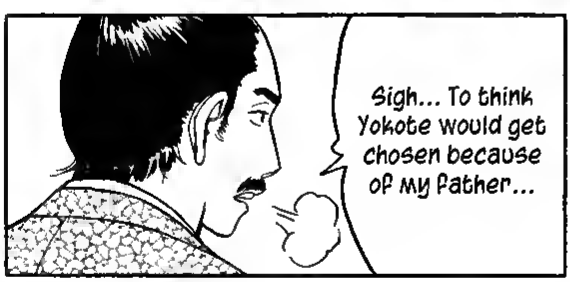
I heard from our lord that all daimyo must propose three locations for where they wish to build their castle,
My head...
Ughh...
We are fine with writing down one place in the letter of request.
No, apparently that's not the case, brother. As long as he did not request our clan to propose multiple locations,
And that Tokugawa rarely grants any daimyo to simply have his first choice.
Though for the Mōri clan, it is true that Tokugawa refused to give them their preferred location.
That is merely a rumour,
Oh really...? I heard that Date Masamune originally wished for a castle closer to the coast than the one currently in Sendai.

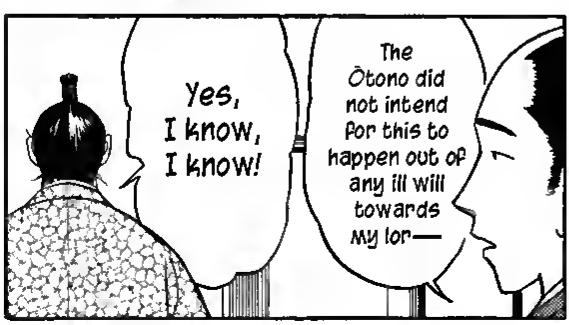
It's fine.
Mnn...
Pardon?
Well, since Mōri Terumoto was one of the chief leaders of the Western army, it's not surprising that Tokugawa has such a hostile attitude...
Or you'll really find assassins coming for you!
Hey, hey. Don't start making underhanded schemes now.
Let's request our lord to include Kubota as the second choice in the official letter of request to Tokugawa.
Oh, still?
Ugh, you reek of sake!
Hahaha, don't worry.

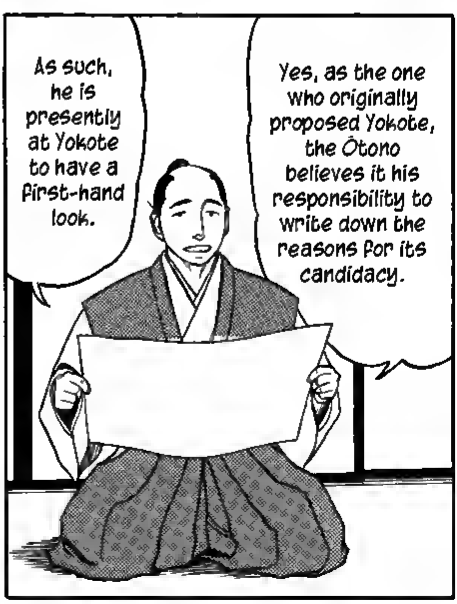
No matter what we do, we must first report to Tokugawa...


The note from my father?
What else must I include?

Yes, my lord.
Here.


Sigh... To think Yokote would get chosen because of my father...


Yes, I know, I know!
The Ôtono did not intend for this to happen out of any ill will towards my lor—


As such, he is presently at Yokote to have a first-hand look.
Yes, as the one who originally proposed Yokote, the Ôtono believes it his responsibility to write down the reasons for its candidacy.

So that I may receive the Ōtono's report.
Then I will also leave for Yokote today.
...
Yes...
...Is there really a need for you to personally go all the way there?
Have you made the arrange-ments?
Yes, it should be in our old fief now.
Good...

There is no other way. It must be done even at the cost of my entire income.
...
You know, this requires the employment of a considerable number of outside help in Hitachi...
Two days later, Yokote
My apologies, Naizen.

Hmm... Yes, this should do for our reasons in choosing this location...
Oh no, it's none of your fault, of course...
To think things would turn out this way...
Is there anything else I should write?
Yokote is situated further South than Tsuchizaki and Kubota, and thus consequently closer to Edo as well.
Well...
Haha. Flattering Tokugawa, I see.
If any calamity were to befall Edo, then we will be able to provide quicker aid if we can build our seat at Yokote... How about something like that?

Fine, I suppose...
Forgive me for besmirching your honour, Ōtono, but this is all for the sake of your son, Yoshinobu!
Naizen!

Did you... come all the way from Tsuchizaki!?
K- Kajiwara!
...
Are you sending the two letters to Edo yourself?
Of course not...
Pardon?
...What are you scheming!?

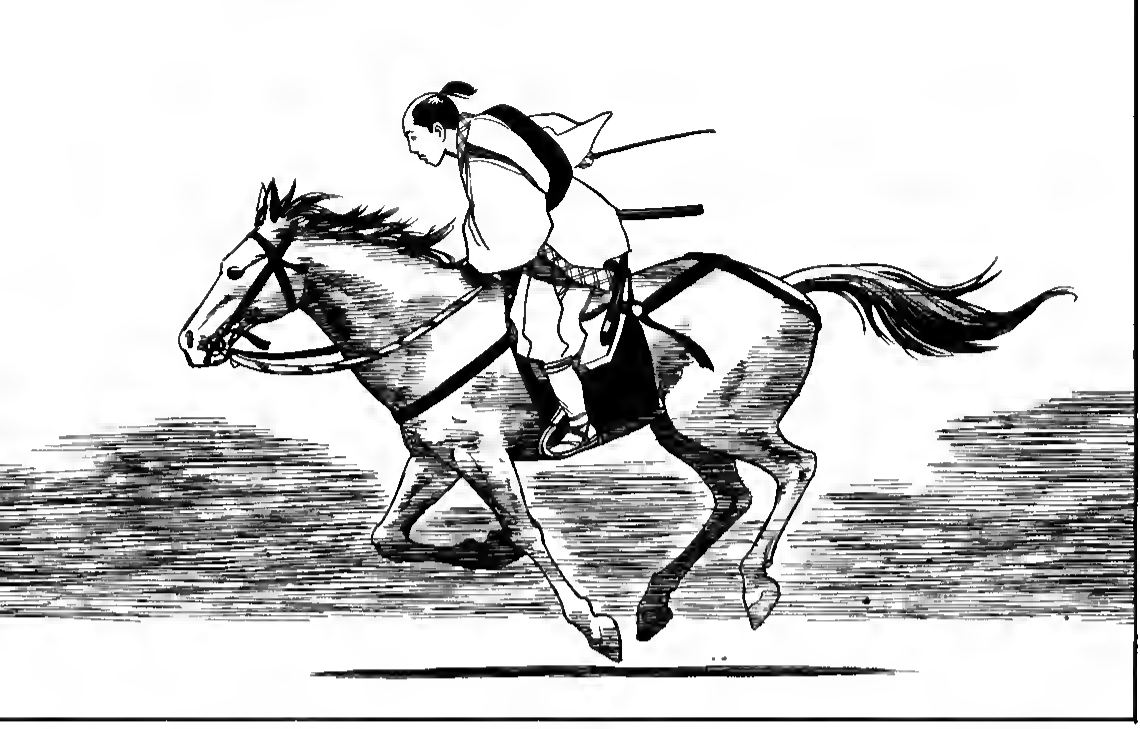
Then show me that letter now!
The letter will be delivered by a messenger while I return to Tsuchizaki.
I have only come to Yokote to assist the Ōtono with his letter.
I know it is unreasonable!
A retainer cannot go peeping at private letters written by our lord! It is unreasonable!
I'm afraid that's out of the question...
What!?
After all, you've already seen it as well, have you not?
...
Don't think so deeply.
Oh dear...
...

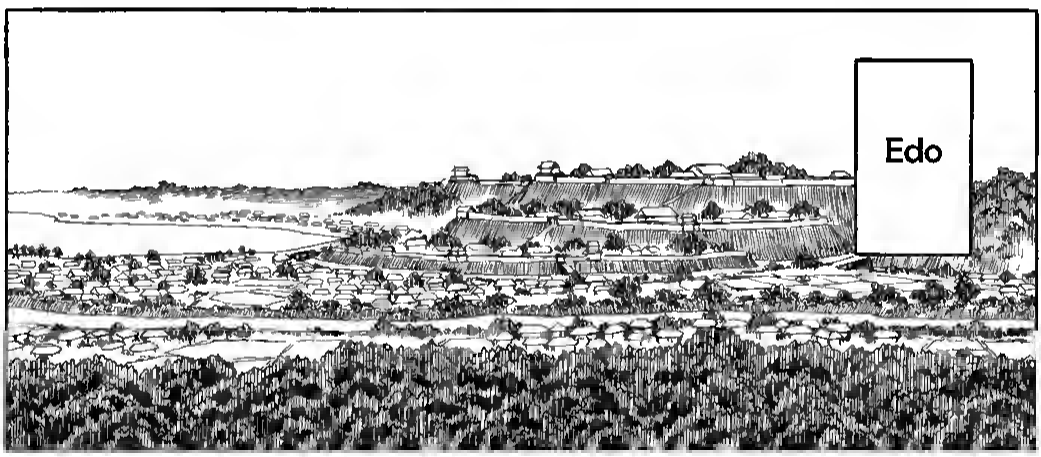
A secret just between us, okay?
Well, considering the favour you provided for me on that night, I suppose I have no choice...
Nghh...
This is our lord's castle construction request,
And this is the Otono's supporting letter stating the explanations for the choice.
...
...
...
Kubota... as the second choice...?

...
Are you satisfied?
But I do not believe an esteemed clan such as the Satake needs to willingly comply that far.
Official terms require three candidate locations to be proposed,
IF I did, that would be treason, you realize?
...
You didn't think I'd actually do something so underhanded as to switch the letters, did you?
Here.
Oh, cut it out already!
On a second thought, let me hand the messenger those letters!

It's fine.
Oh, okay...
But, sir...
Huh?
Don't you dilly-dally now.
Yes, sir!
It won't be possible to cross the ridge once snow falls, after all...

That takes care of the first step!
Well,
This is war...!
Kajiwara...
Quick-ly!
...
カッポ
カッポ



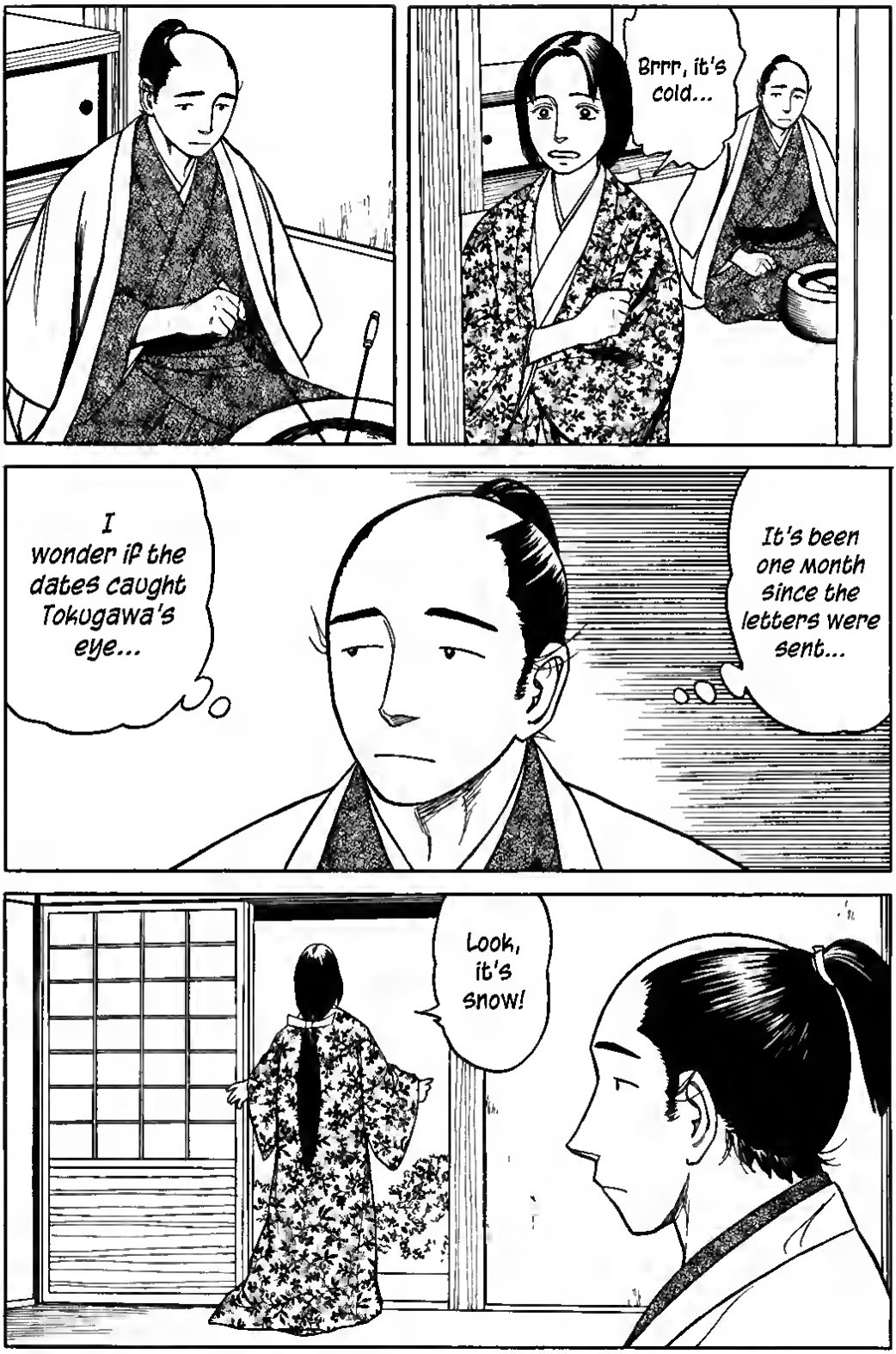

Edo

Edo
Castle

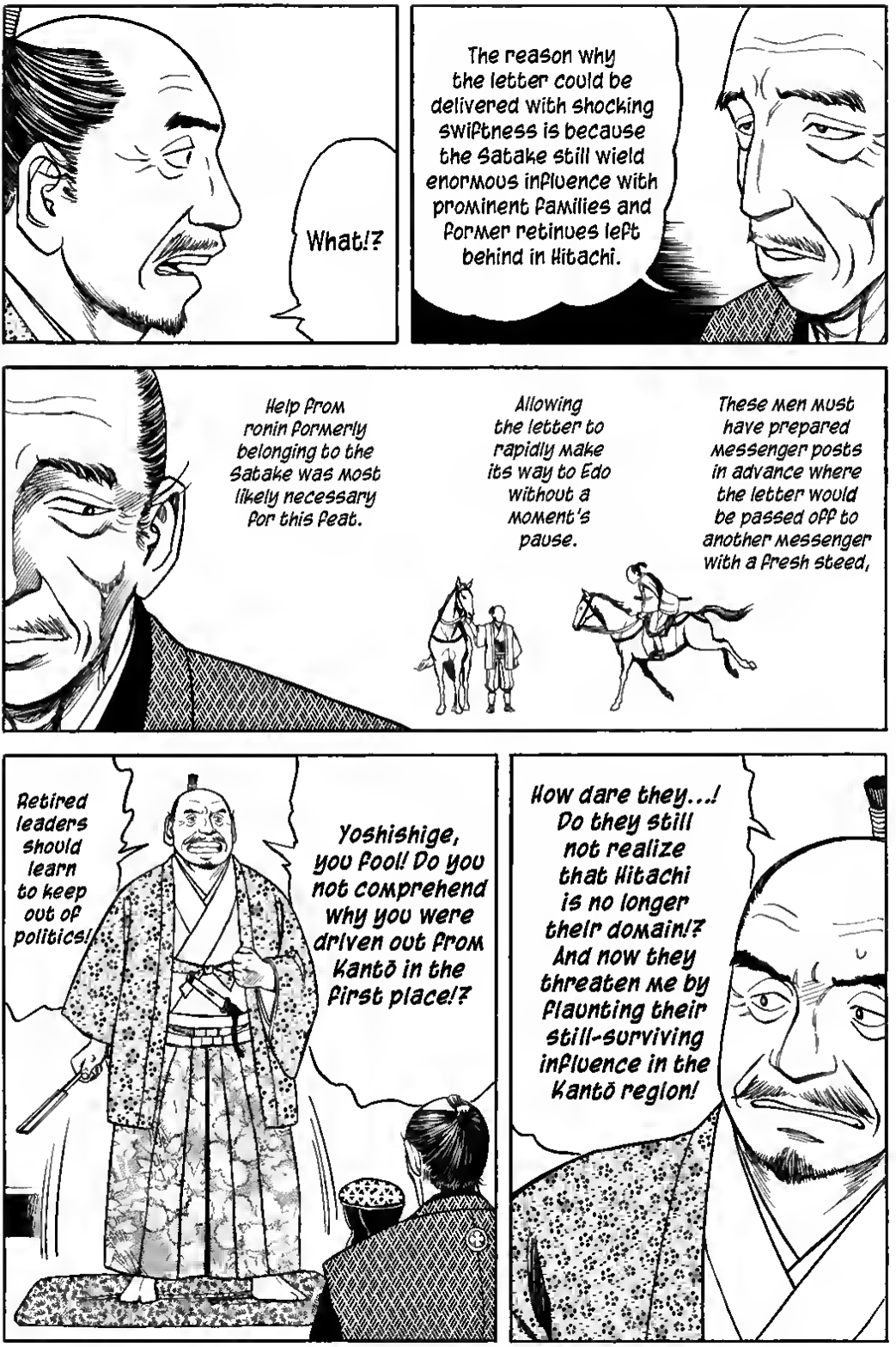
Tokugawa Ieyasu
A letter from the Satake?
Is it something that requires personal action from me?
Tokugawa's confidant, Honda Sado-no-Kami
But I believe it would be wise for my lord to at least have a look.
No...
Hmm...
This is Yoshinobu's request to build a castle, and this is a supporting letter from his father, Yoshishige...

...
And this is from Yoshishige, is it now...
I see...
Yes...
Please look closely at the dates.
Let them build their castle at Yokote or wherever they want. I was a little harsh in dealing with them, so the least I can do is let them have their castle.
Hmm... So? Just what is so special about these letters?
Yes, not only is it further up, but it is also within a mountain range. It should normally take half a month from there to Edo...
Is Yokote not further up North than the Uesugi clan's Yonezawa domain?
Hm...?
O-October 22nd!? Is that not just three days ago!?

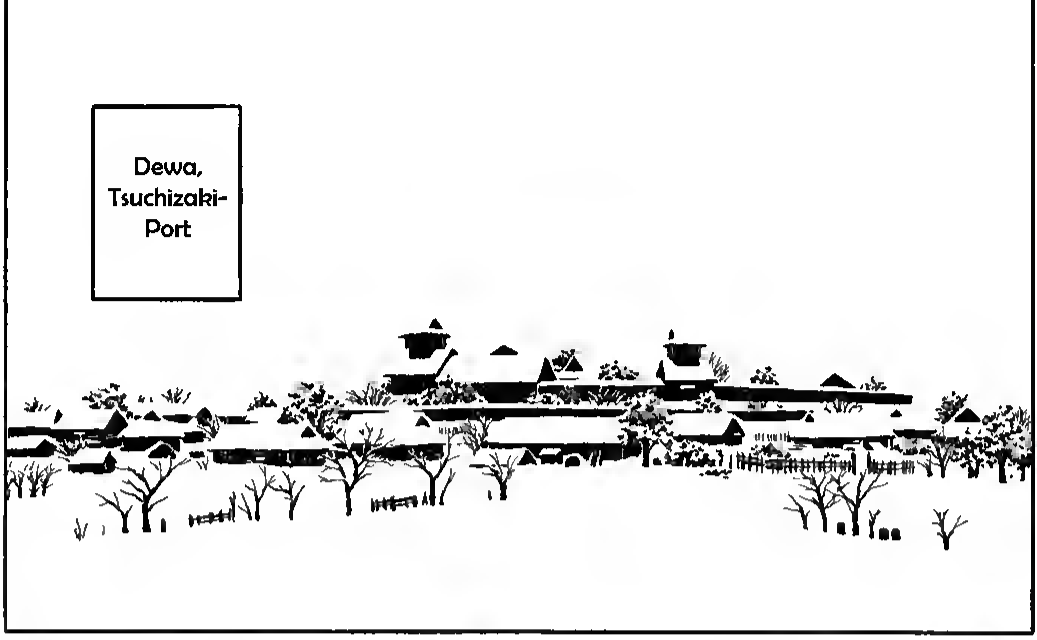
It's not strange for there to be a two day difference between Tsuchizaki and Yokote... But a mere three days from Yokote to Edo?
Is it even possible?
Did Yoshishige miswrite the date?
I doubt both father and son would accidentally write the wrong date...
Even if so, that would still make Yoshinobu's letter sent only five days ago.
Did he wish to demonstrate that through this quick delivery?
I do not know.
Yoshishige wrote that Yokote would allow the Satake to assist us quicker should any calamity ever befall Edo.
Perhaps if the messenger switched horses constantly... or if he were a ninja relying on some deceit...
Yes, my lord...
Hmm... It seems there's a need for us to take a closer look at the Satake clan.


Brrr, it's cold...
I wonder if the dates caught Tokugawa's eye...
It's been one month since the letters were sent...
Look, it's snow!

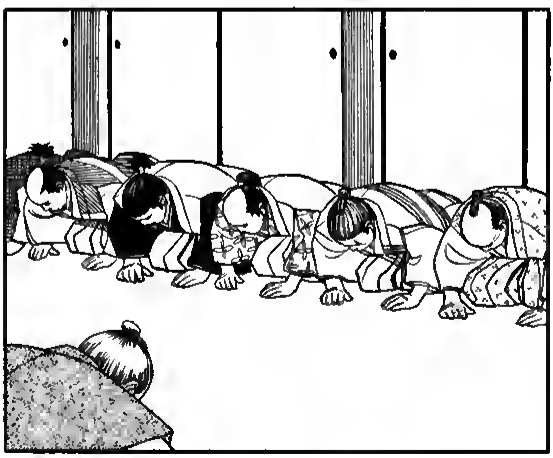
According to the man I sent out to investigate, opinions are split between Yoshinobu and his father Yoshishige on where to build the castle.
Oh?
Did you find anything relevant about the Satake?
Yes.
And in the end, Yoshishige's proposal passed?
Yoshinobu proposed Kubota, which lies close to the port at Tsuchizaki, while Yoshishige was firmly set on Yokote.
Hmm?
There is more to this matter than meets the eye at a first glance.
Yes, but...

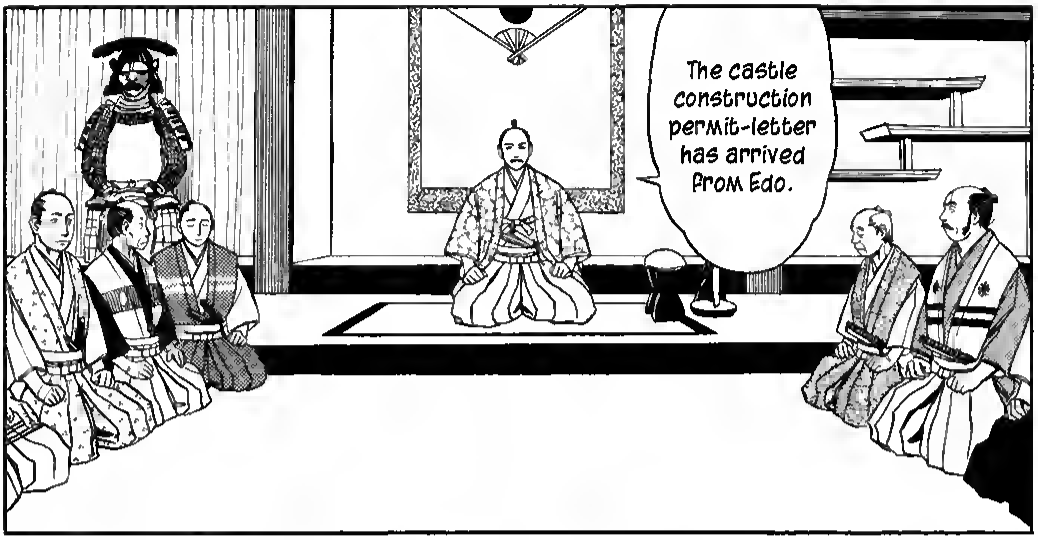

What!?
The reason why the letter could be delivered with shocking swiftness is because the Satake still wield enormous influence with prominent families and former retinues left behind in Hitachi.
Help from ronin formerly belonging to the Satake was most likely necessary for this feat.
Allowing the letter to rapidly make its way to Edo without a moment's pause.
These men must have prepared messenger posts in advance where the letter would be passed off to another messenger with a fresh steed,
Retired leaders should learn to keep out of politics!
Yoshishige, you fool! Do you not comprehend why you were driven out from Kantō in the first place!?
How dare they...! Do they still not realize that Hitachi is no longer their domain!? And now they threaten me by flaunting their still-surviving influence in the Kantō region!

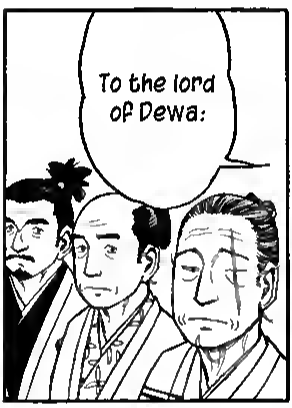
What is so humorous?
Haha...
He should leave matters of governance solely to his heir, Yoshinobu! The old must learn to step down!
Hahaha!
Or do you wish to say something?
I... I'm an exception. None of that applies for me,
Well, my lord. Yoshishige is younger than you are.

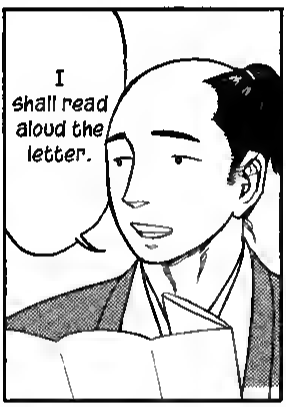

Dewa,
Tsuchizaki-
Port

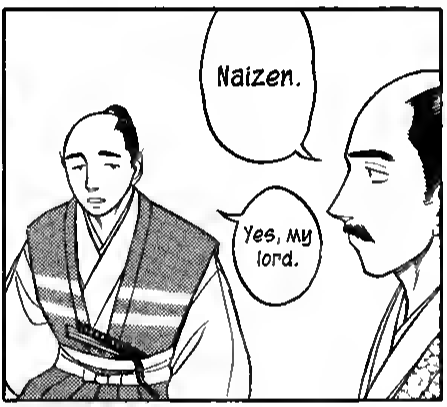
Yes, it's hard even getting around the castle grounds.
What a heavy snowfall...




The castle construction permit-letter has arrived from Edo.


To the lord of Dewa:

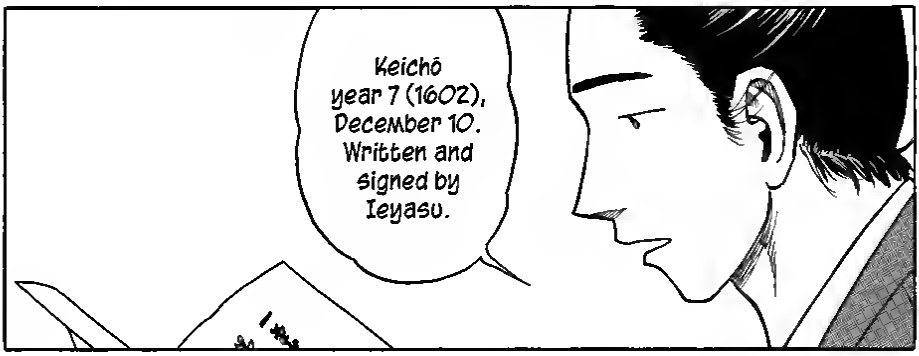

I shall read aloud the letter.

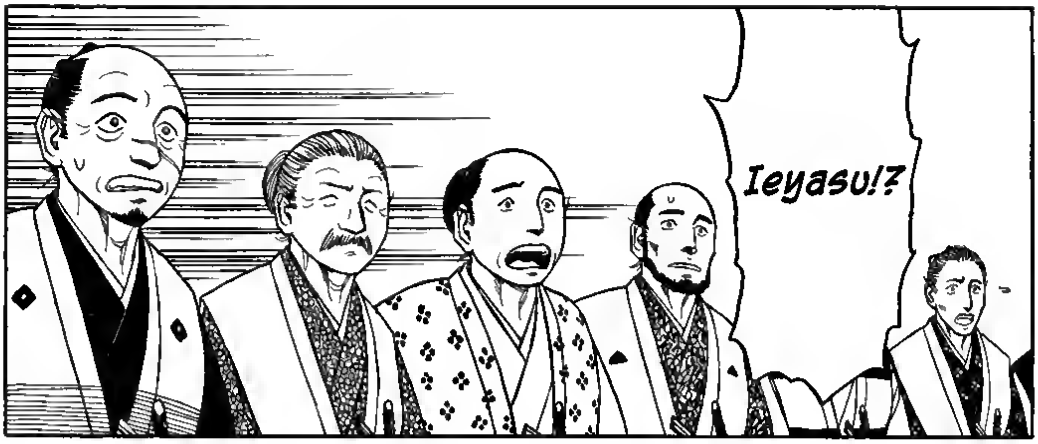

Naizen.
Yes, my lord.

I kindly thank you for taking the distance to Edo into account when choosing the site of your clan's new main castle, so that you can aid me in times of need.

However, since you have already been moved to a new domain, you need not make any further concessions to me at your clan's own personal cost.

As such, you should build the castle at a location most favourable to administering your new province, which I firmly believe is Kuboba. Thus, I command you to build your new main castle there.

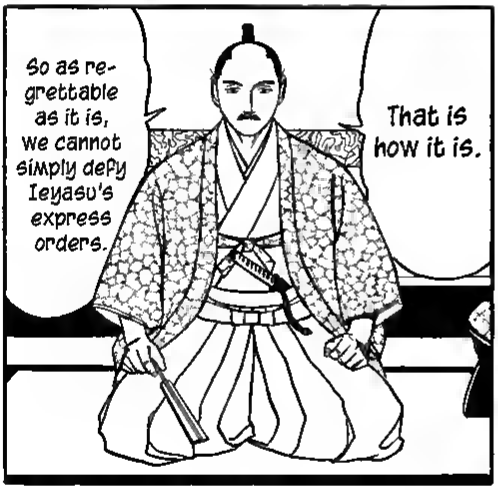

Keichō year 7 (1602), December 10. Written and signed by Ieyasu.


Ieyasu!?

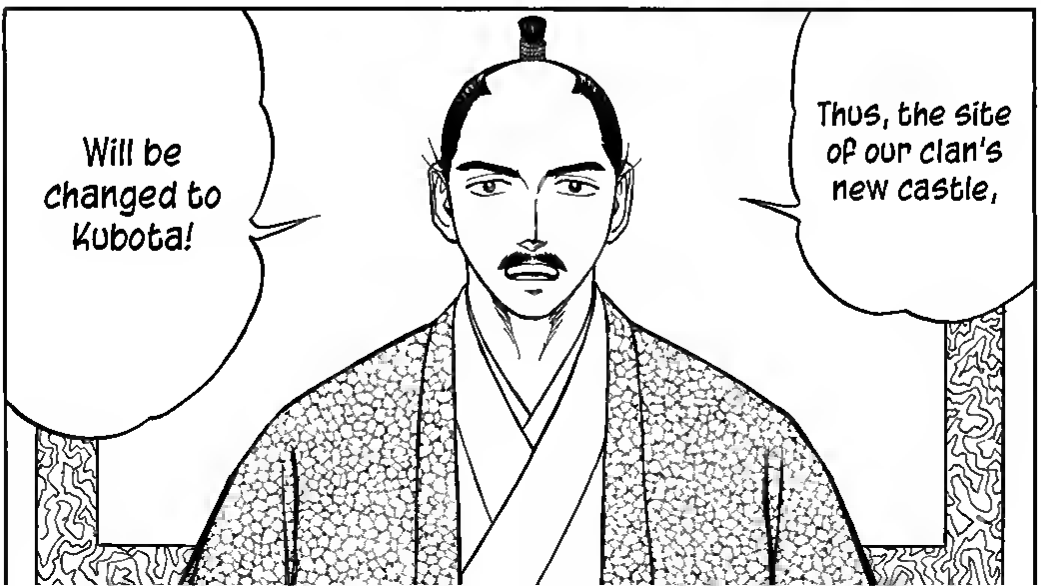
You mean this letter was written by Tokugawa Ieyasu himself!?

Incon-
ceivable!
Impossible...
He prompted
Ieyasu to
personally
take
action!?

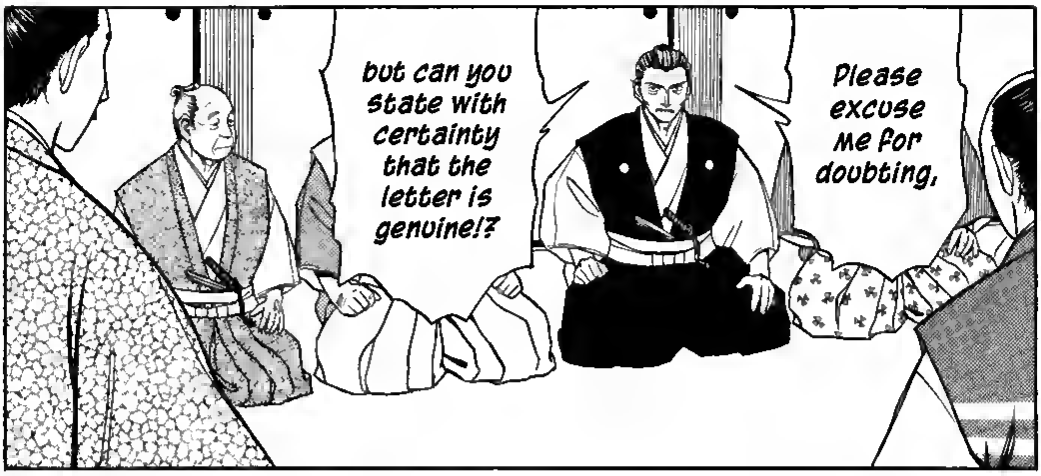
慶長五


So as re-
grettable
as it is,
we cannot
simply defy
Ieyasu's
express
orders.
That is
how it is.

...


Will be
changed to
Kubota!
Thus, the site
of our clan's
new castle,

Naizen, what trick did you play...?
Did you really switch the letters? No, it couldn't have been that...
But if he got Ieyasu to act without changing the contents of those letters then what could it have been...? The arrival dates for the letters?
Date... date...
!!
!?
Wait just a moment!


but can you state with certainty that the letter is genuine!?
Please excuse me for doubting,

Kajiwara! Your objection is out of line!

What!?

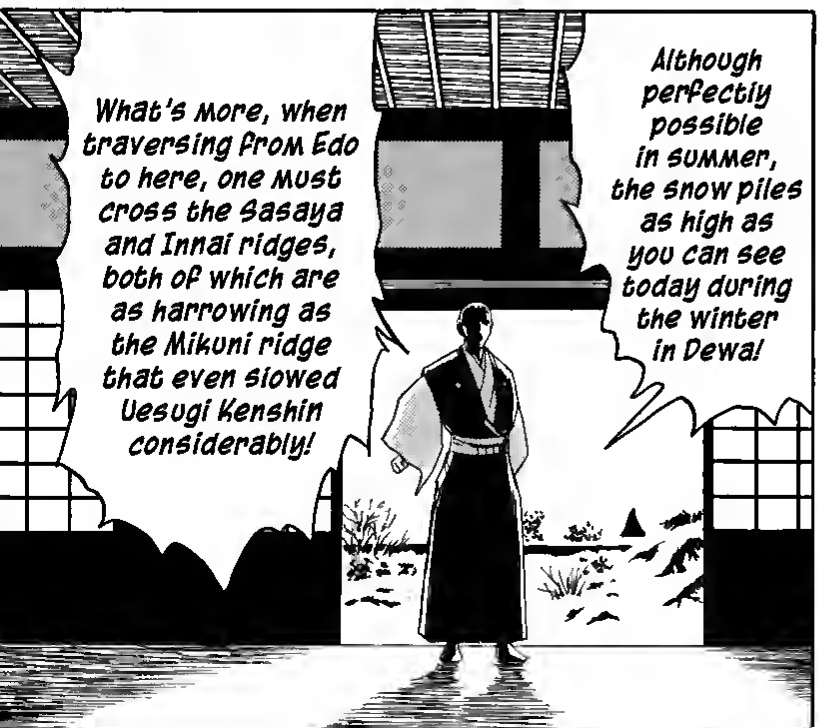
My apolo-gies!

Mino-no-kami!
Kaji-wara!

Behold!

That letter is marked December 10th!
Only five days prior to!

It is true that a fifteen days' travel is normal between Edo and Tsuchizaki!
But that is only in normal circumstances!


Although perfectly possible in summer, the snow piles as high as you can see today during the winter in Dewa!
What's more, when traversing from Edo to here, one must cross the Sasaya and Innai ridges, both of which are as harrowing as the Mikuni ridge that even slowed Uesugi Kenshin considerably!

Ahh...

You're right...!
To cross these two snowy ridges and reach Tsuchizaki in half a month is inconceivable!
And just where is this Messenger from Edo now!?

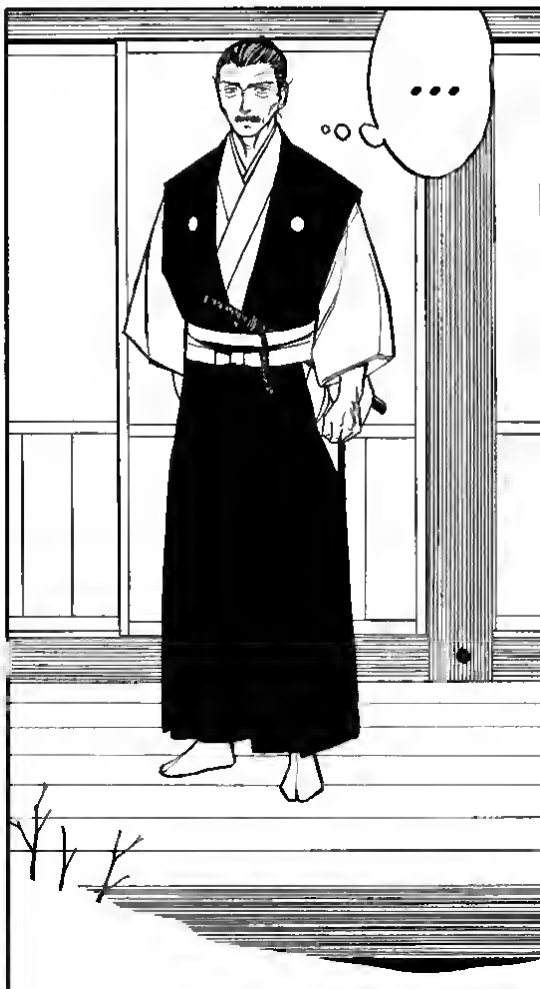
Why do you assume the messenger travelled on land?
Yes, my lord!?
Mino...
Wha...?

He is resting at a lodge in the castle's lower grounds.
The messenger arrived early this morning by boat.
Now would you not agree that a location close to the sea is too valuable to simply give up?

Chapter 4: Beyond the Ridge

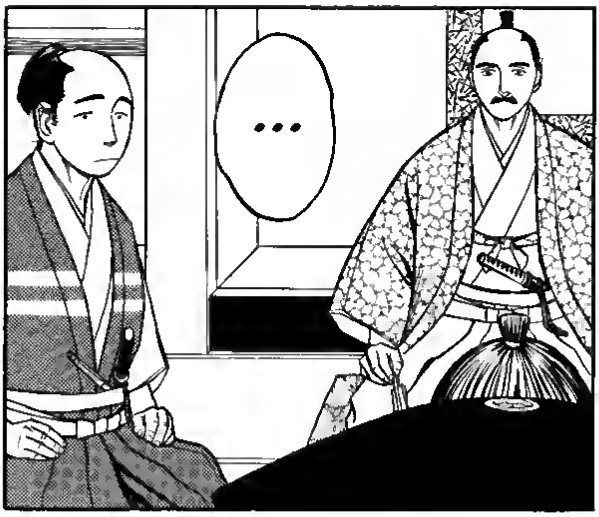
Perhaps my fate has almost reached its end...
Having reached sixty...

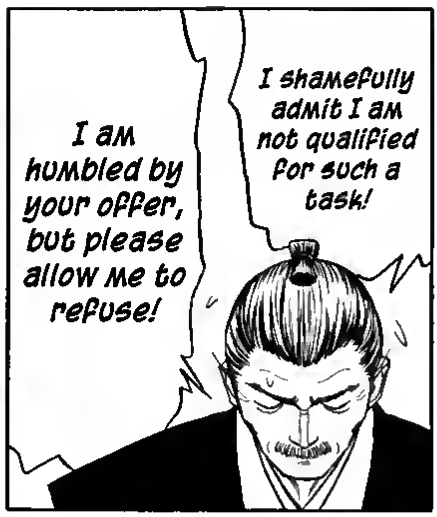
This is my fault!
Forgive me, Kajiwara!


...

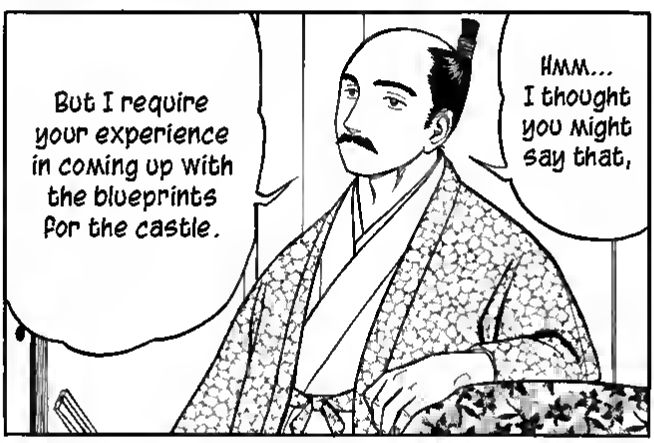
...
Kawai... I joined the plan out of my own desire to fight.
I will go see our lord and tell him that the whole idea was m—
I smeared mud upon your honour by making you take the blame!
Enter.
Kajiwara Mino-no-kami at your service, my lord.

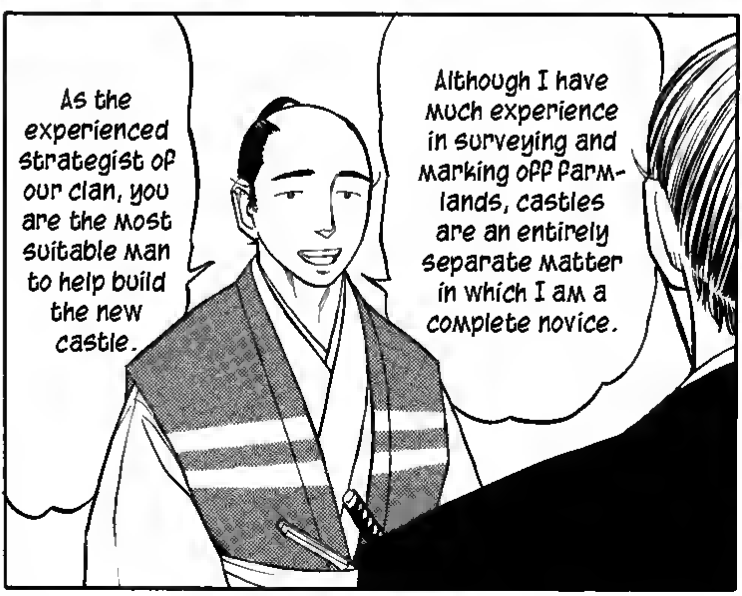
I wish to appoint both you and Shibue Naizen as overseers.
I must appoint the overseer for the castle's construction.
Cutting to the chase,
M-My lord...!
...
Yes, My lord!


...


I am humbled by your offer, but please allow me to refuse!
I shamefully admit I am not qualified for such a task!

It is not only me, but Naizen as well who requests your wisdom.


But I require your experience in coming up with the blueprints for the castle.
Hmm... I thought you might say that,


As the experienced strategist of our clan, you are the most suitable man to help build the new castle.
Although I have much experience in surveying and marking off farmlands, castles are an entirely separate matter in which I am a complete novice.

Furthermore, I may be an experienced strategist... But you have bested me, Naizen...
I was the leader of the anti-Kubota faction! I have not even an inkling as to what an ideal castle at Kubota requires!
No, no, no...!
In any case, please throw away trifling personal worries and assist me in the construction!
Whatever are you talking about...?
Hm...?
Oh dear, I don't think I can handle it all alone, however...
My hands will not move! My mind will not turn!
I cannot!
Wha...

Naizen, you form up the plans, and Mino will merely check it over.
Then how about this?
...
I'm afraid I—
Y-yes, I suppose, if my inexperience is disregarded...
There should be no problems then, right?
Yes, my lord!
Yes, my lord!
That's enough! This is an order!

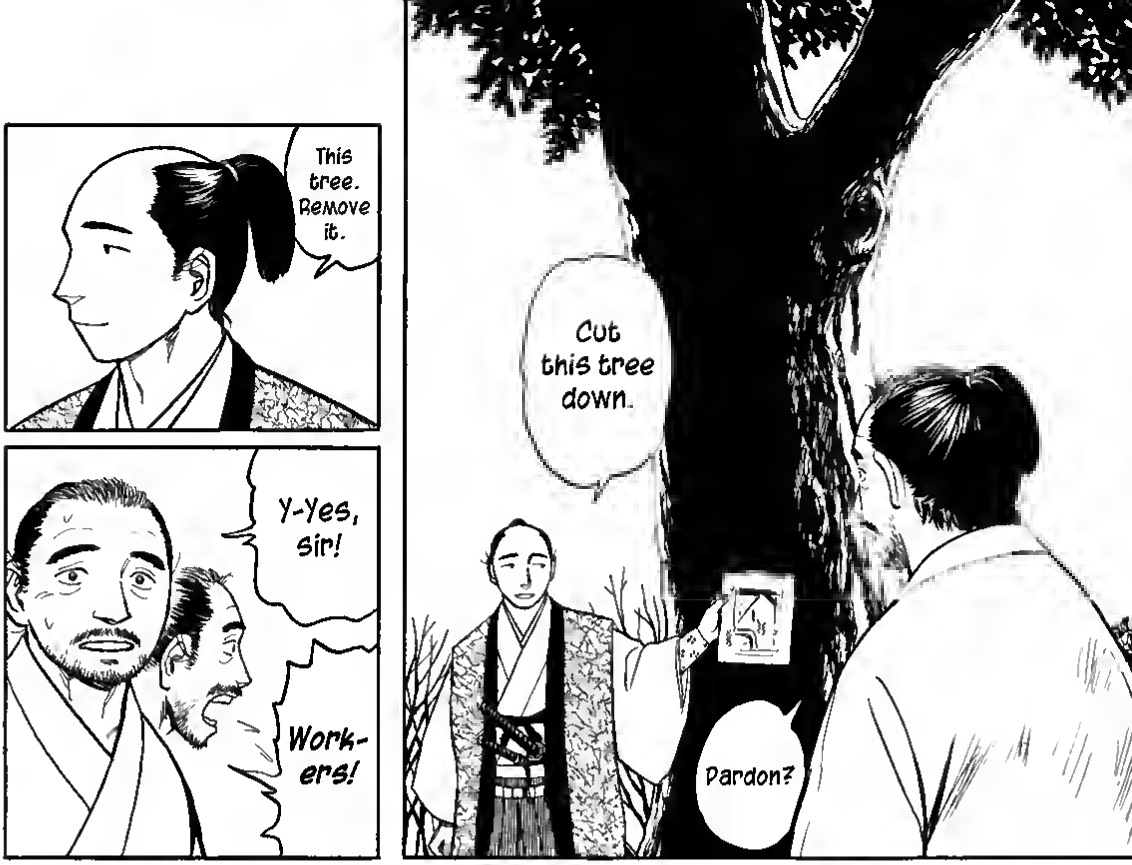
Should I have the layout fit into the hills, or...?
Hmm... What to do...

Ah, you there.

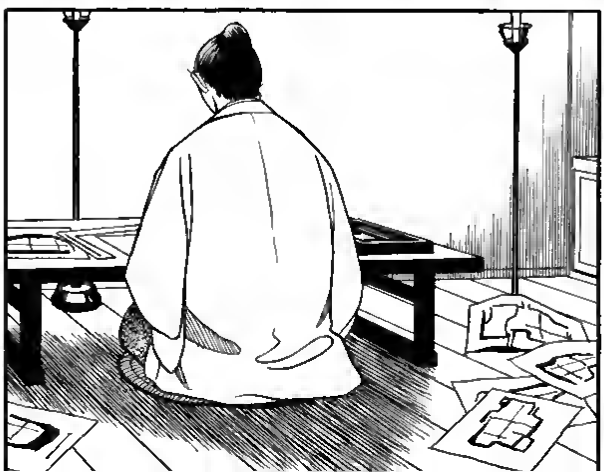
Yes?

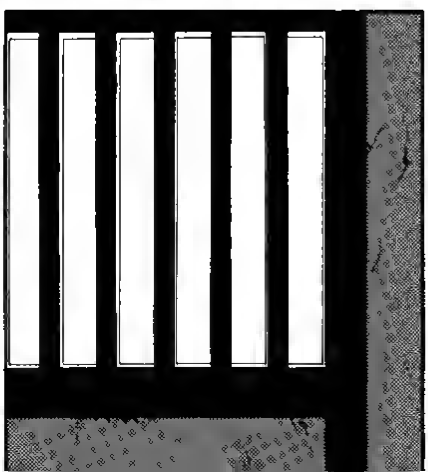
...

To get a clearer idea of the best dimensions of the castle and its grounds.
First, these thickets must be cleared,

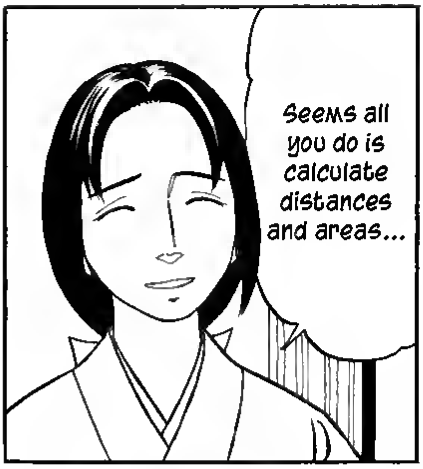

This tree. Remove it.
Y-Yes, sir!
Work-ers!
Cut this tree down.
Pardon?

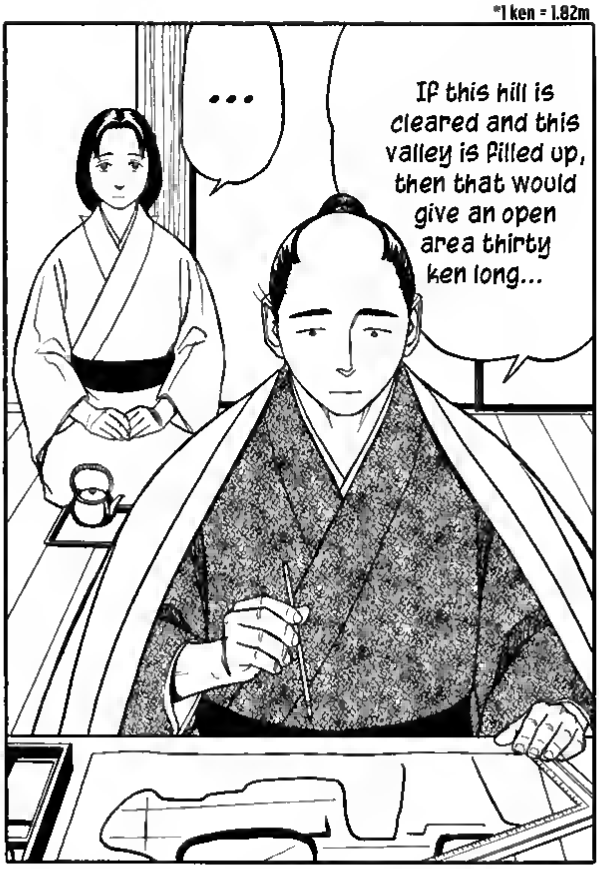
HMMM...
Do we have to remove the roots too?
Whoa, it's huge!



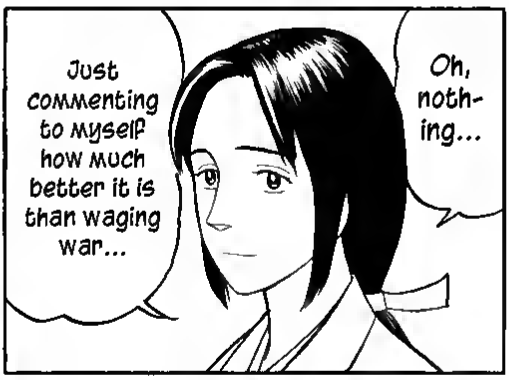


*1 ken = 1.82m

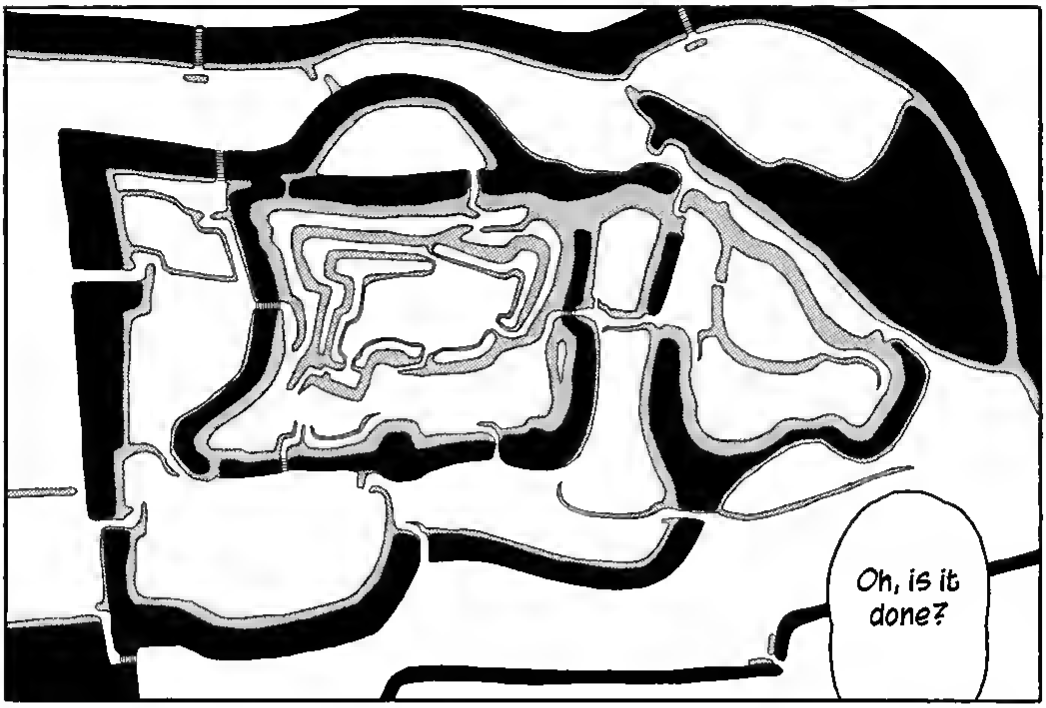

Seems all you do is calculate distances and areas...


...
If this hill is cleared and this valley is filled up, then that would give an open area thirty ken long...

Did you say some-thing?
Hmm?

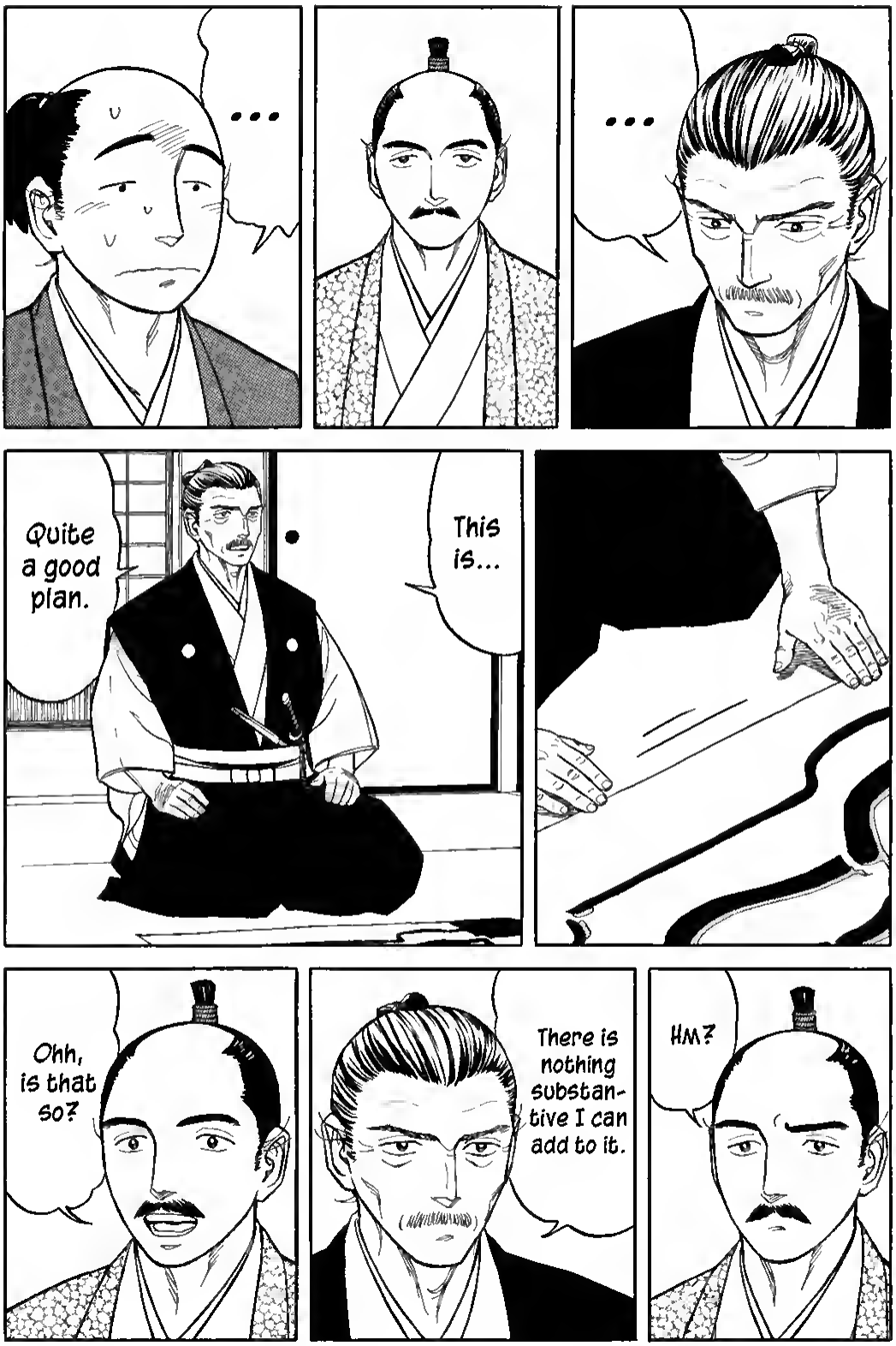

Just commenting to myself how much better it is than waging war...
Oh, noth-ing...

...


Oh, is it done?

HMM...
Yes, I see...

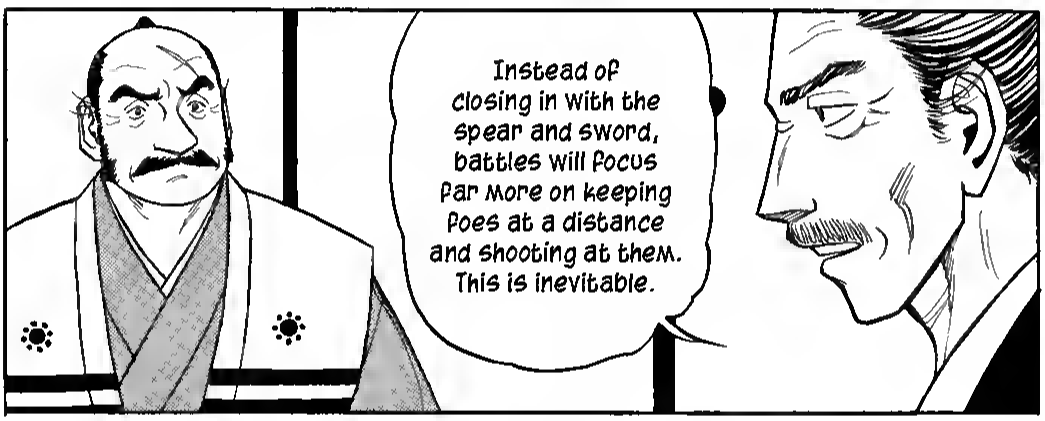
Please share any insights with me, sir.
Mino, take a close look.
Yes, my lord.
I'm glad the previous incident ended with no punishments...
Kajiwara...
...
So use this chance to show how inexperienced Naizen still is!

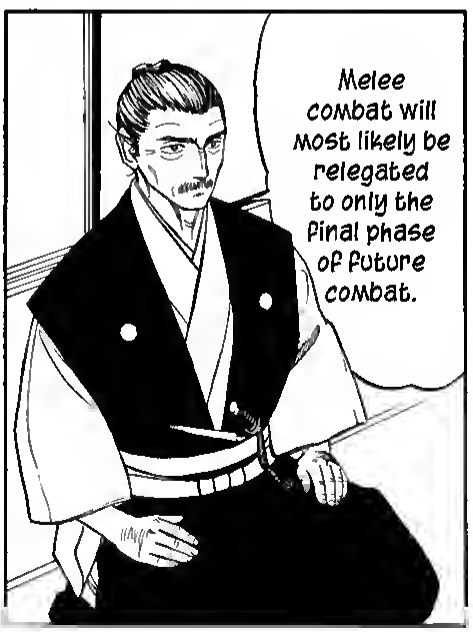

...
...
Quite a good plan.
This is...
Ohh, is that so?
There is nothing substantive I can add to it.
HM?

Then allow me to take a look as well...
I...
What? Kajiwara, you realize this will serve as the main castle for all future generations of the Satake clan, no!?
Should you not examine this more closely...?
I have.
Just a series of plain-looking sections like rice paddies...
This doesn't seem to be anything special to me...
Hmm, now that you mention it, you're right...
And there are too few yokoya, wouldn't you agree?
I-Is this castle not lacking enough defensive structures? For instance, a section right behind the entrance where if enemies were to storm the gates, they can be fired upon from all sides?

*Yokoya: Sections of the castle wall from which arrows and guns can be fired to flank enemies attempting to scale or breach the walls.

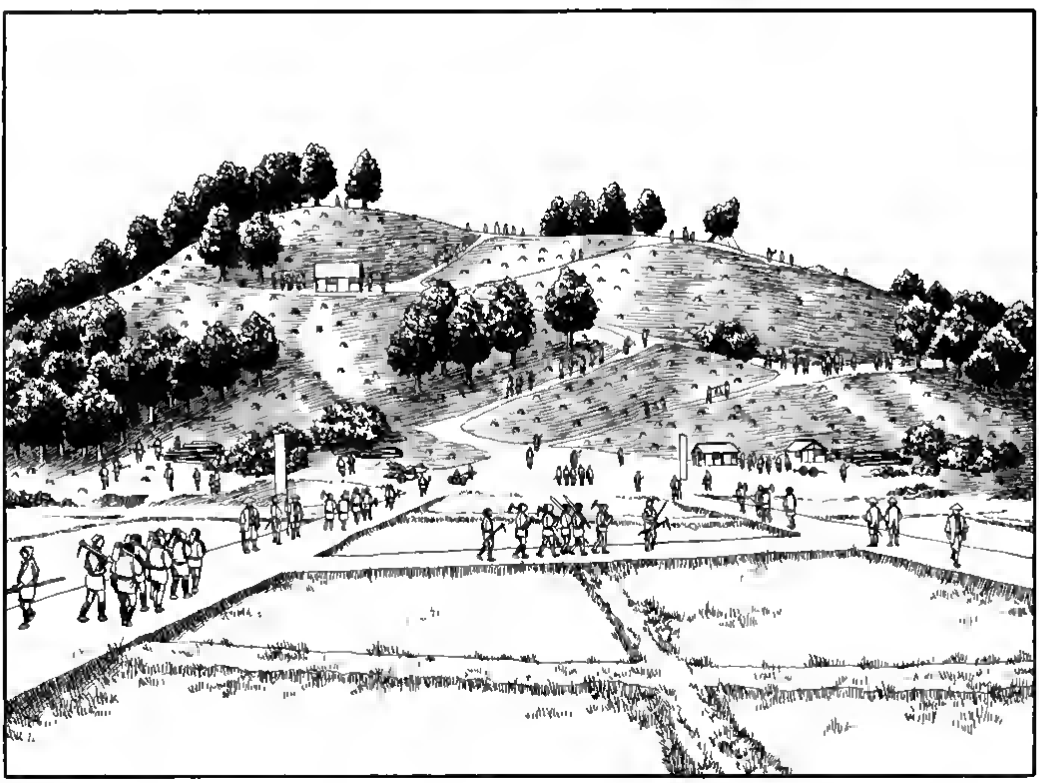
and the features of war that were once so common must change accordingly.
...
Muskets and cannons alike will likely develop greater effective ranges as time marches on,


Instead of closing in with the spear and sword, battles will focus far more on keeping foes at a distance and shooting at them. This is inevitable.


Melee combat will most likely be relegated to only the final phase of future combat.

...
Thus, the castle needs no substantial defenses for its inner grounds.
In other words, the battle is already lost if the enemies are close enough to fight hand-to-hand.
Here, there are three platforms at different heights situated close enough to fire upon enemies approaching the gates.
At a glance, Naizen's plans seem quite ordinary, but take a closer look at the section near the front gates...
In other words, garrisons at three distinct areas of the castle can concentrate their fire upon any enemy attempting to storm the gates.
Truly, a castle fit for the coming new age.
This is a defensive tactic based not on countering the enemy with the blade, but by criss-crossing as many lines of gunfire from all angles as possible.

Well done, Naizen!
Is that so?
I am fully taken by its magnificence...
Still...
N-no, not at all... The castle's still only at its blueprint stage...
Kawai...!
Then I'm sure it will be a splendid castle...!
O-Oh, that's not to criticize the castle or anything... If Kajiwara praises it so highly,
similar to our previous Mito castle at Hitachi...?
Instead of having a series of three walled platforms, would it not be simpler but equally effective to have one high wall behind the moat,



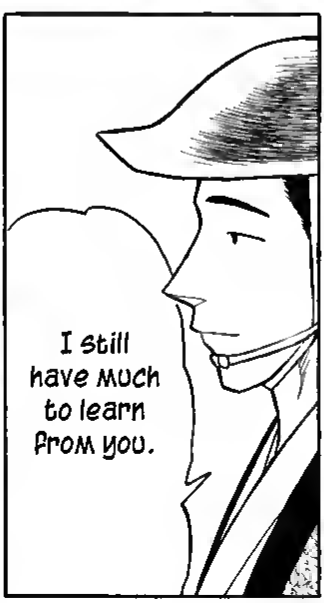
Sir!

What are you talking of? You've stepped in to take care of everything yourself.

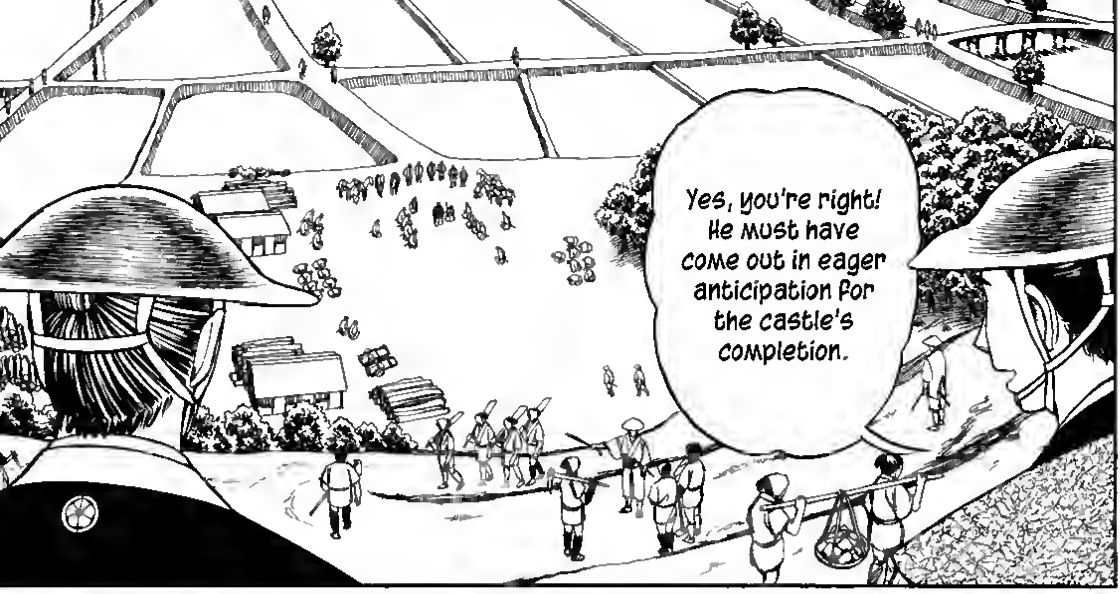
Thanks to your guidance, everything is progressing smoothly.

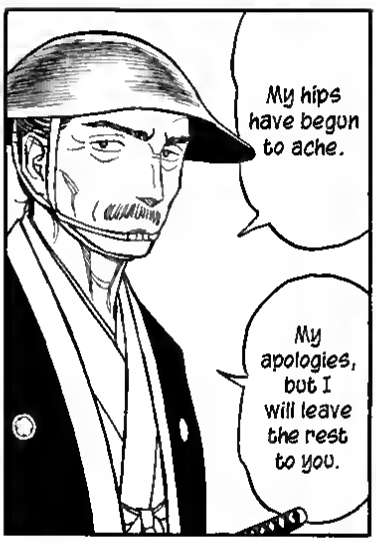
Hmph...

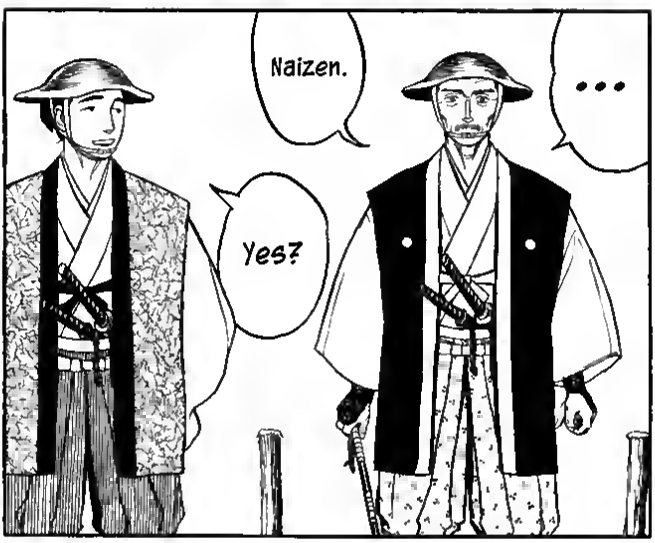
Hm? Is that... our lord?

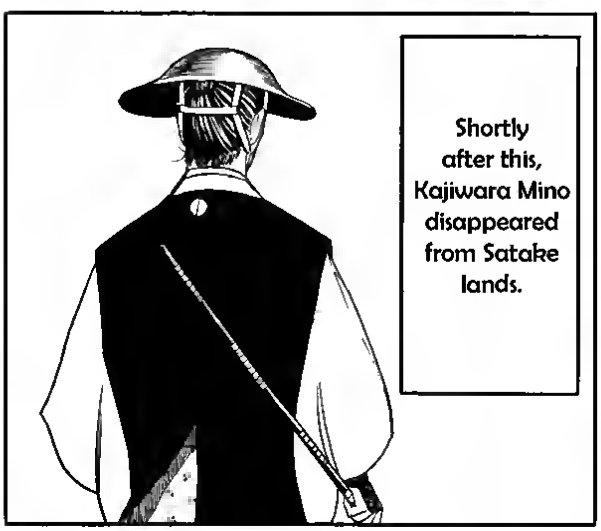

I still have much to learn from you.

There is no place for me anymore.
Surely you jest.


Yes, you're right! He must have come out in eager anticipation for the castle's completion.

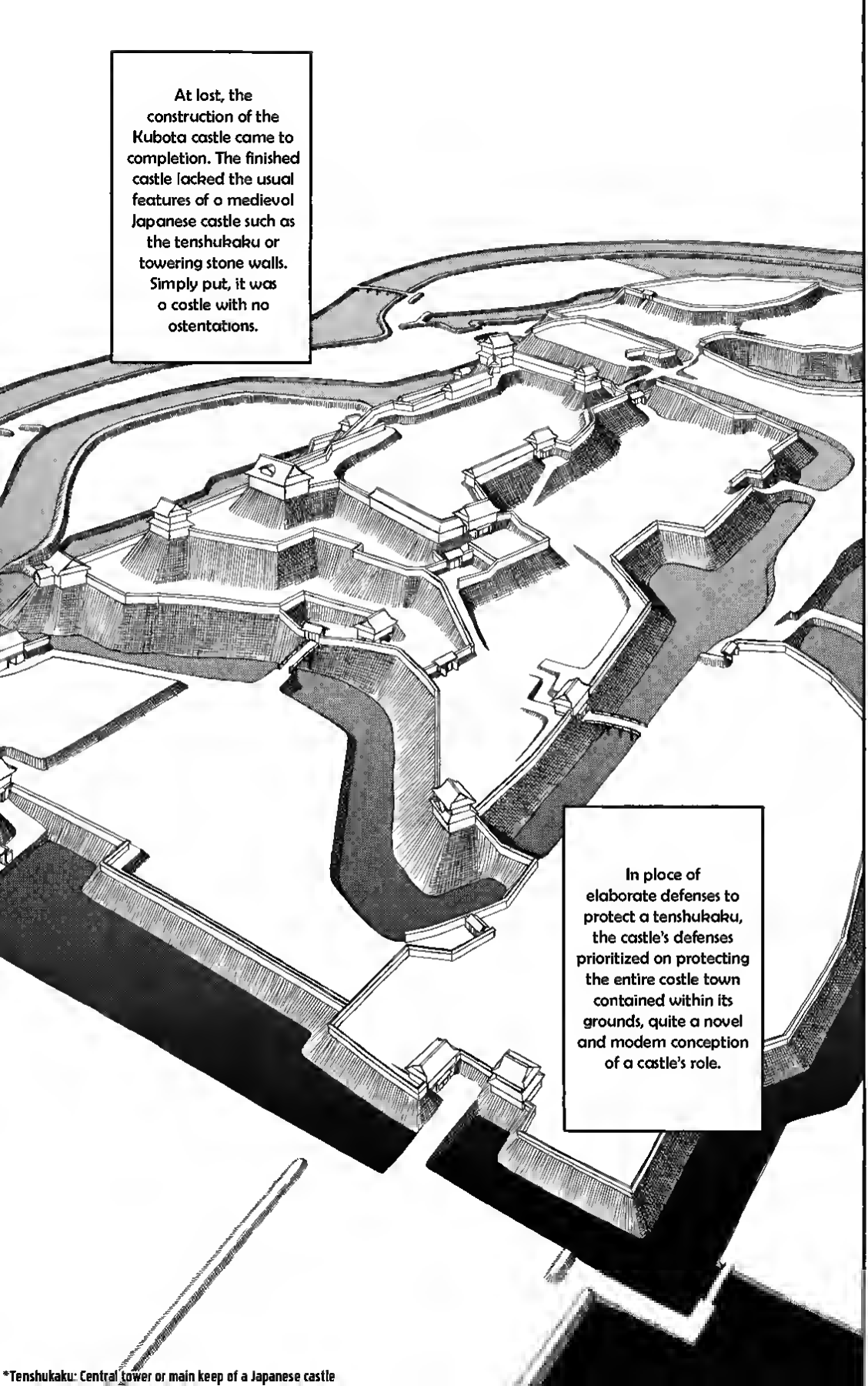

My hips have begun to ache.
My apologies, but I will leave the rest to you.


Naizen.
...
Yes?

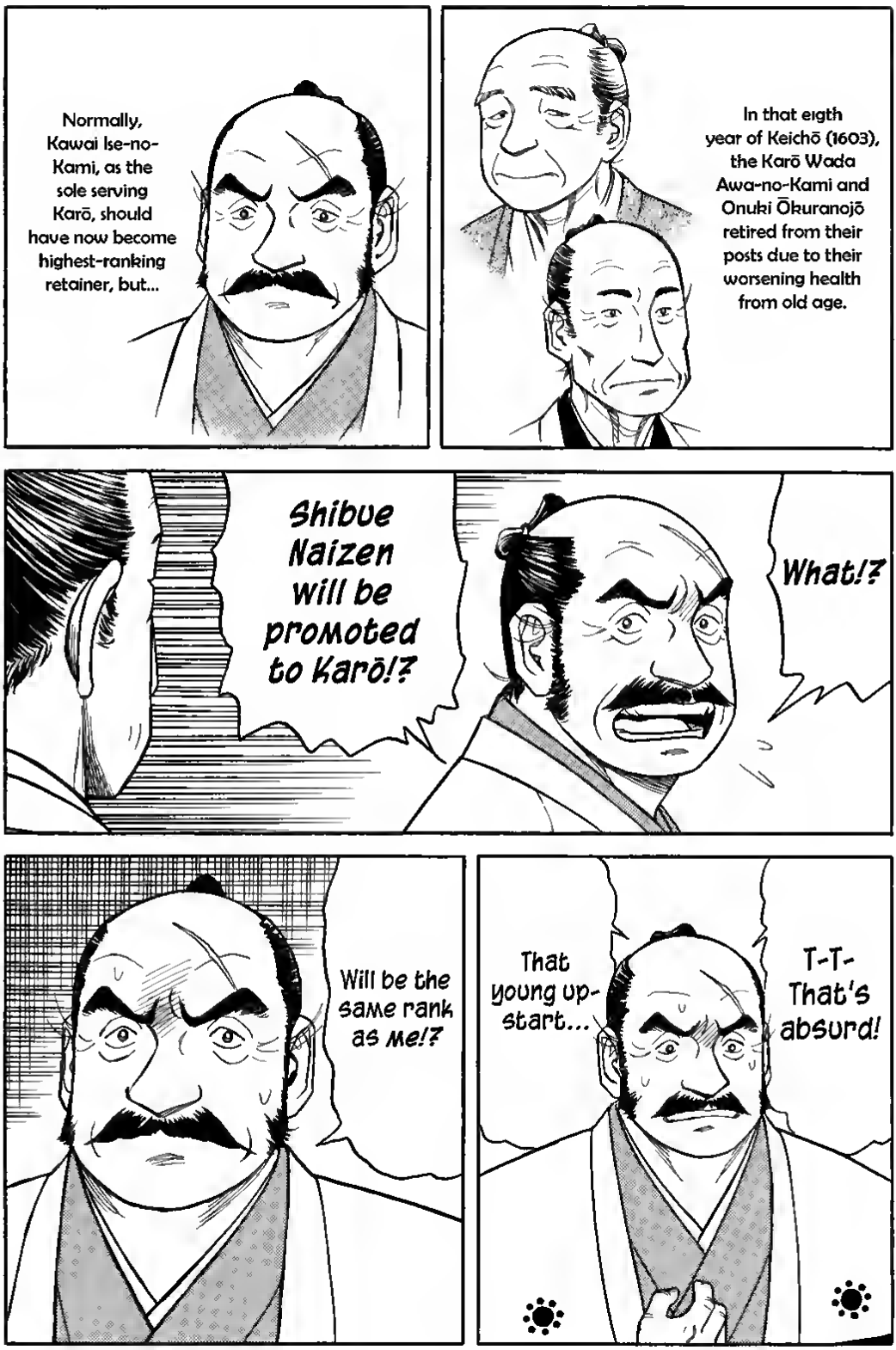

Shortly after this, Kajiwara Mino disappeared from Satake lands.

Yes...

Or because he still harboured some resentment over the castle's construction.
Or even yet...
Perhaps it was because he realized he had no place to be in the Satake clan anymore,
Whatever the reason, he and his family moved to the neighbouring province of Fukui and became servants to the Matsudaira clan.
He may have left after sensing danger to his life...
...


At last, the construction of the Kubota castle came to completion. The finished castle lacked the usual features of a medieval Japanese castle such as the tenshukaku or towering stone walls. Simply put, it was a castle with no ostentations.
In place of elaborate defenses to protect a tenshukaku, the castle's defenses prioritized on protecting the entire castle town contained within its grounds, quite a novel and modern conception of a castle's role.

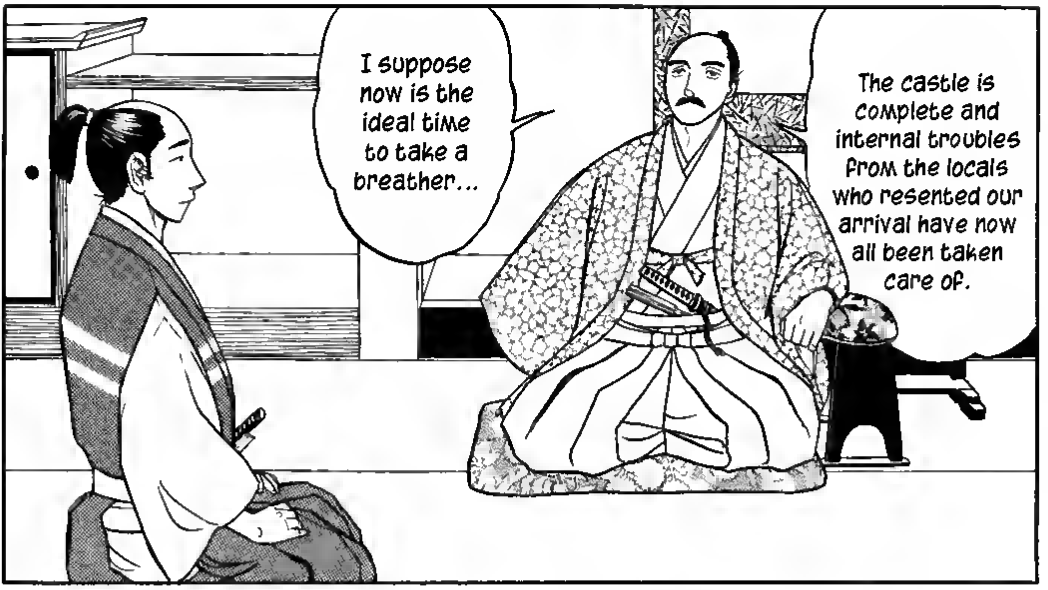
*Tenshukaku: Central tower or main keep of a Japanese castle

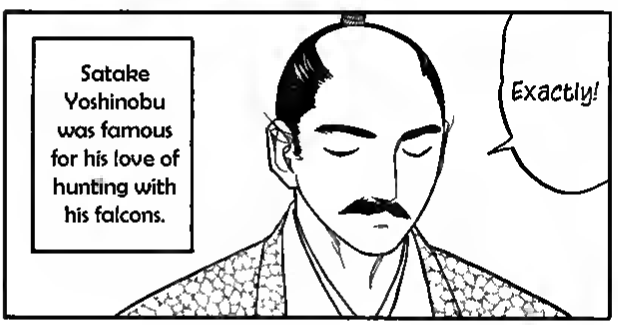

Normally, Kawai Ise-no-Kami, as the sole serving Karō, should have now become highest-ranking retainer, but...
In that eigth year of Keichō (1603), the Karō Wada Awa-no-Kami and Onuki Ōkuranojō retired from their posts due to their worsening health from old age.
Shibue Naizen will be promoted to Karō!?
What!?
Will be the same rank as me!?
That young up-start...
T-T-That's absurd!

I heard Naizen's promotion to Karō was due to Wada's recommendation...
Moreover, was he not a former rōnin?
Is the world coming to an end?
A callow like him made Karō before any of his seniors from our generation...?
Hmph! That retired old man should keep his nose out!
Then why does he not still go by the name Arakawa?
Hmm... I believe it was Arakawa... Arakawa Yagorō... I think he formerly served the now destroyed Oyama clan...
A rōnin, is that what you think...
Would you happen to know Shibue Naizen's former name?

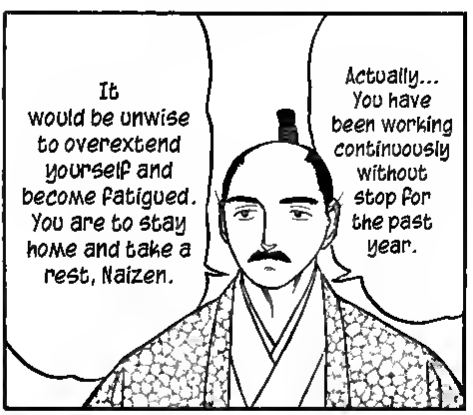
...
Do you know why!?
After coming to serve our lord, he was quickly adopted by the Shibue family!
Do you understand? He is a commoner with absolutely no link to noble blood!
He was merely some starving commoner our lord took an interest in when out hunting with his falcon one day!
You're right! We cannot allow this!
And now that commoner will be promoted so high that he can look down upon all other senior retainers! How can this be allowed!?
We must do something!

...
We must eliminate him...
Umm, Umezu...
Ah, I see...
Yes, thank you for informing me.
To our lord...
Please also send my best regards,
N-no, nothing...
What?


I suppose now is the ideal time to take a breather...
The castle is complete and internal troubles from the locals who resented our arrival have now all been taken care of.

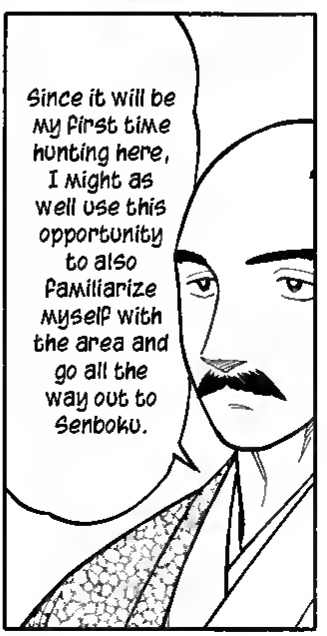

Satake Yoshinobu was famous for his love of hunting with his falcons.
Exactly!

You mean falcon-hunting?


It would be unwise to overextend yourself and become fatigued. You are to stay home and take a rest, Naizen.
Actually... You have been working continuously without stop for the past year.

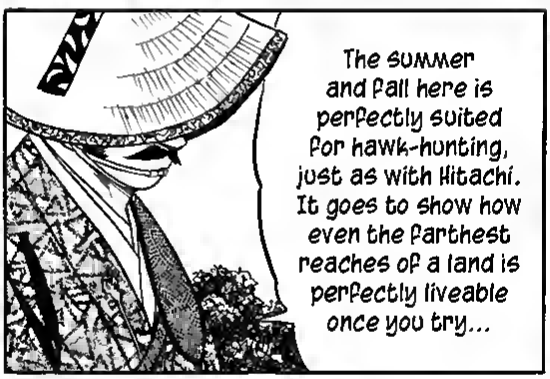
Oh... Yes, my lord...

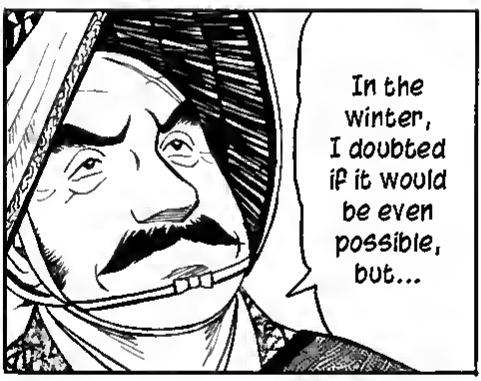
Excellent idea, my lord. I too will—


Since it will be my first time hunting here, I might as well use this opportunity to also familiarize myself with the area and go all the way out to Senboku.

Dear, how long are you planning to sleep for? It's already noon, you know.
This time, I'll bring along... Ah yes, Shuma will do.
You have to sleep when you actually have time!
It's fine, the lord specifically instructed me to take a rest.
...
I'm not going to become a karō.
Oh, that's just a rumour.
Sometimes, I wonder how you'll ever cut it out as a karō...

Ahh... What fine weather we have today.


The summer and fall here is perfectly suited for hawk-hunting, just as with Hitachi. It goes to show how even the farthest reaches of a land is perfectly liveable once you try...

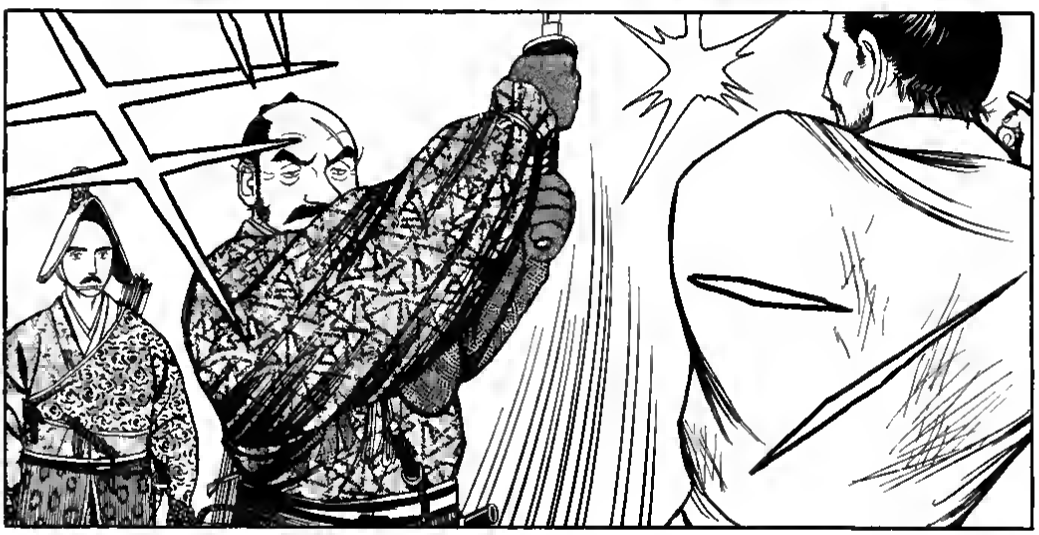

In the winter, I doubted if it would be even possible, but...

That's not very like you at all.
Why so senti-mental, Ise?

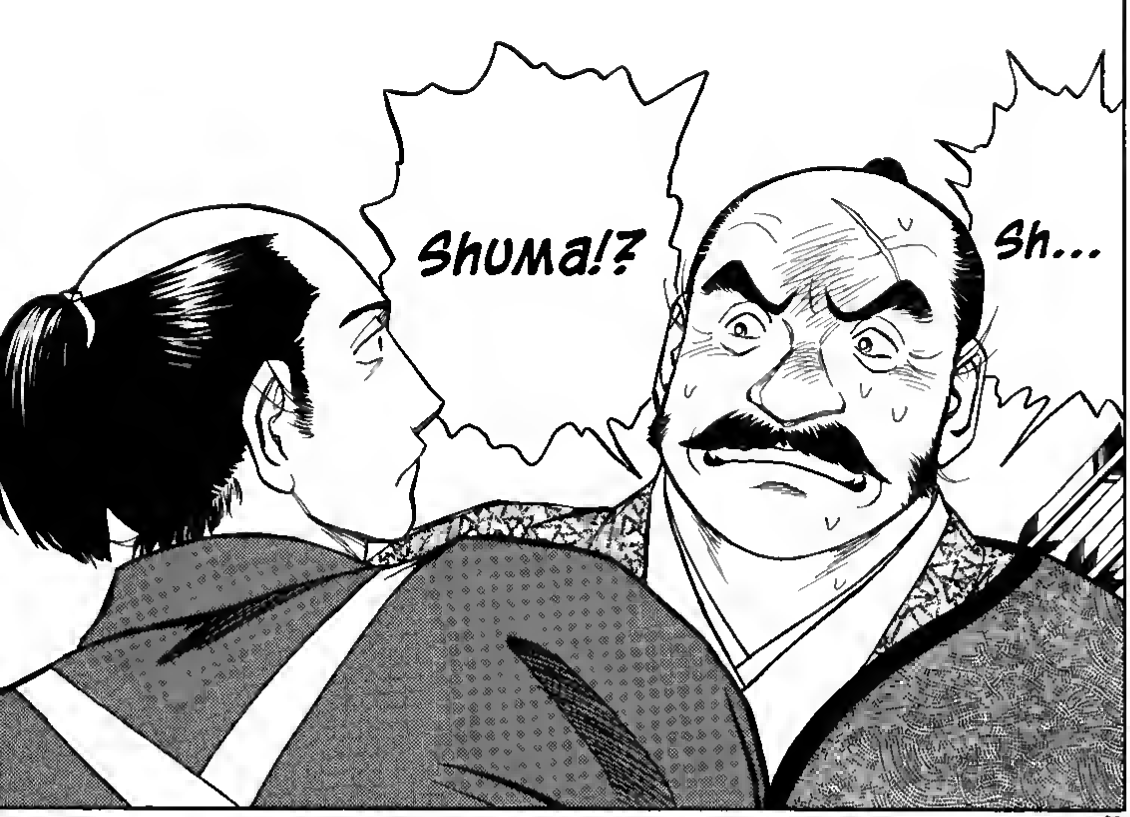
Since coming to Dewa, I was wracked with worries about my lord forgetting us old retainers...
I am merely expressing my delight, that is all.
Ha...
Yes, but now that the troubles are over, we can enjoy ourselves falcon-hunting once more...
Which did not afford me the time to seek out your consent.
There were many matters of urgent importance since our arrival here,
Although my actions in the past year were solely for the good of our entire clan, I apologize for all the grievances I may have inflicted...
I am truly grateful from the bottom of my heart that you invited this worthless old fool!
My lord!

!!
What is this, an insurrection!?

Rahhhh!

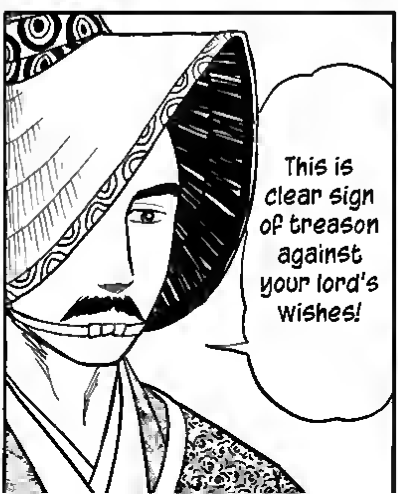


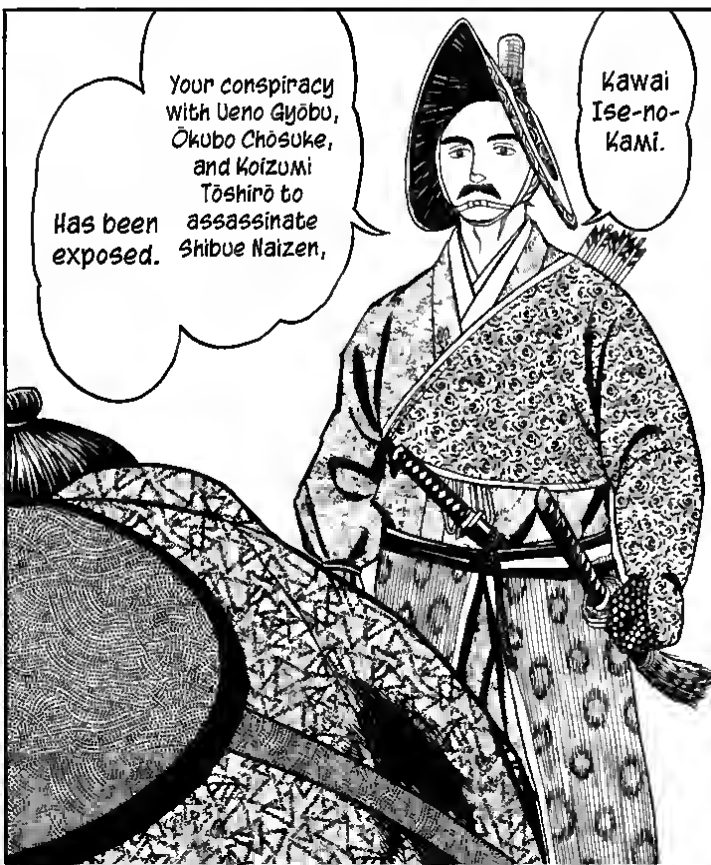
My lord!
Do you have any idea who we are!?
You scums!


Shuma!?
Sh...

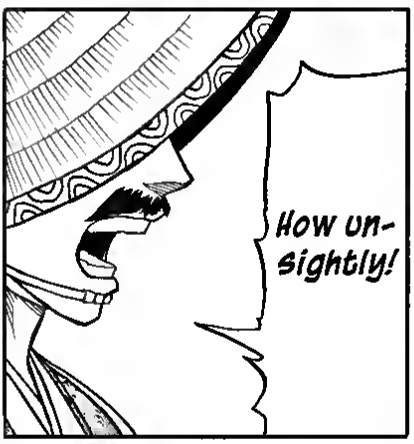
M... My lord... What is the...

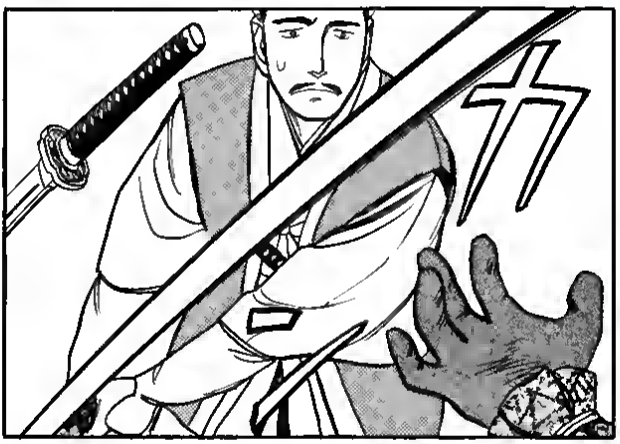
!!


This is clear sign of treason against your lord's wishes!

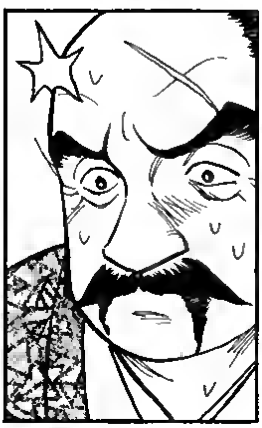

Kawai Ise-no-Kami.
Your conspiracy with Ueno Gyōbu, Ōkubo Chōsuke, and Koizumi Tōshirō to assassinate Shibue Naizen,
Has been exposed.

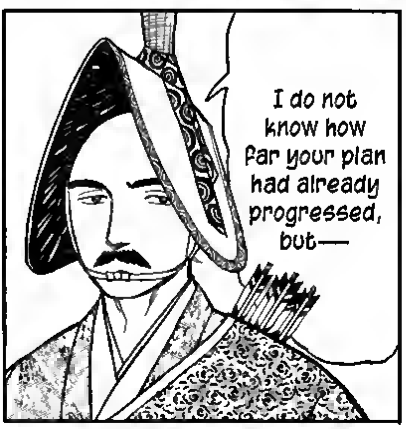
This is a misunder-standing!
This—


How un-sightly!



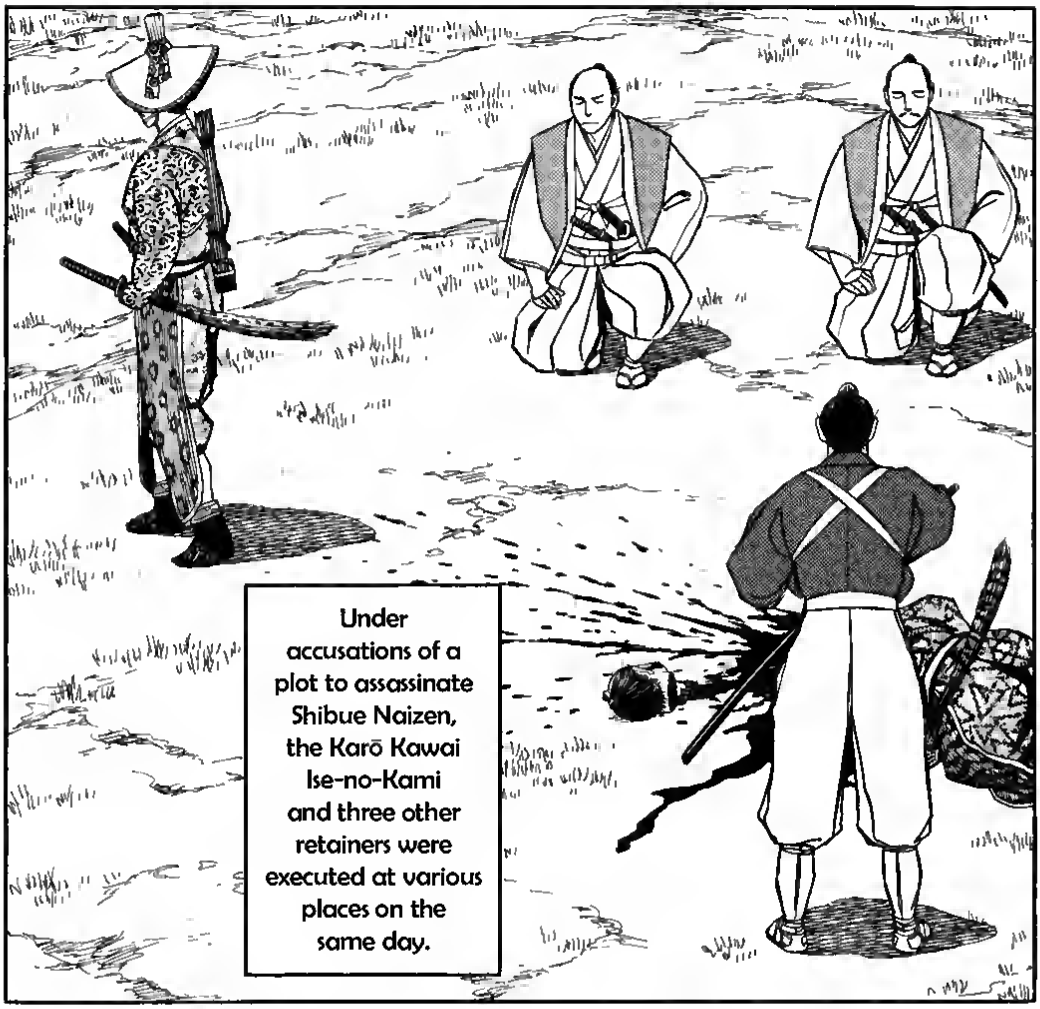
I see... So from the start, my lord was...

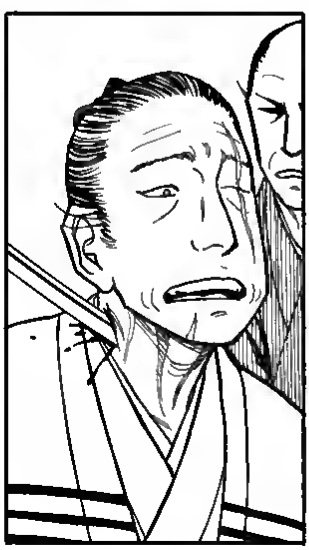


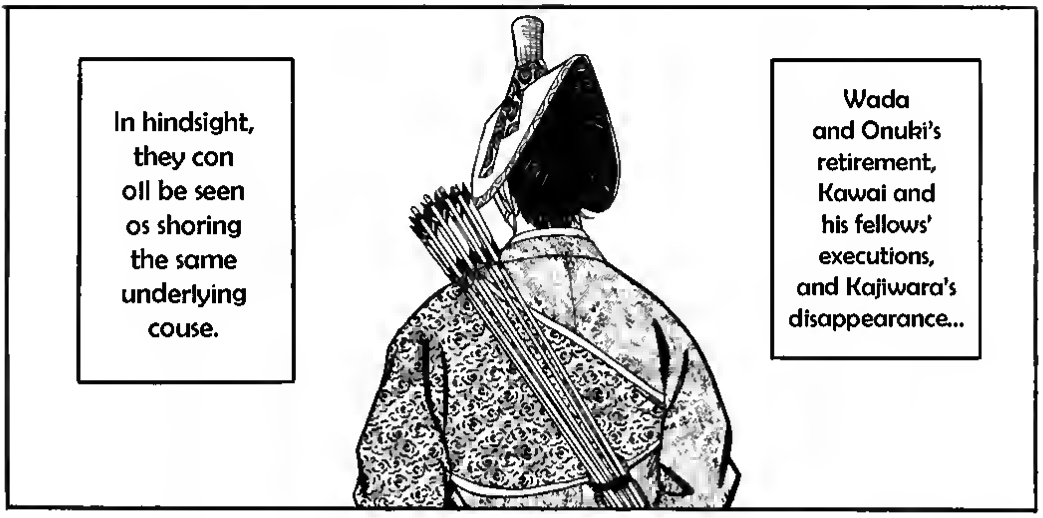

I do not know how far your plan had already progressed, but—

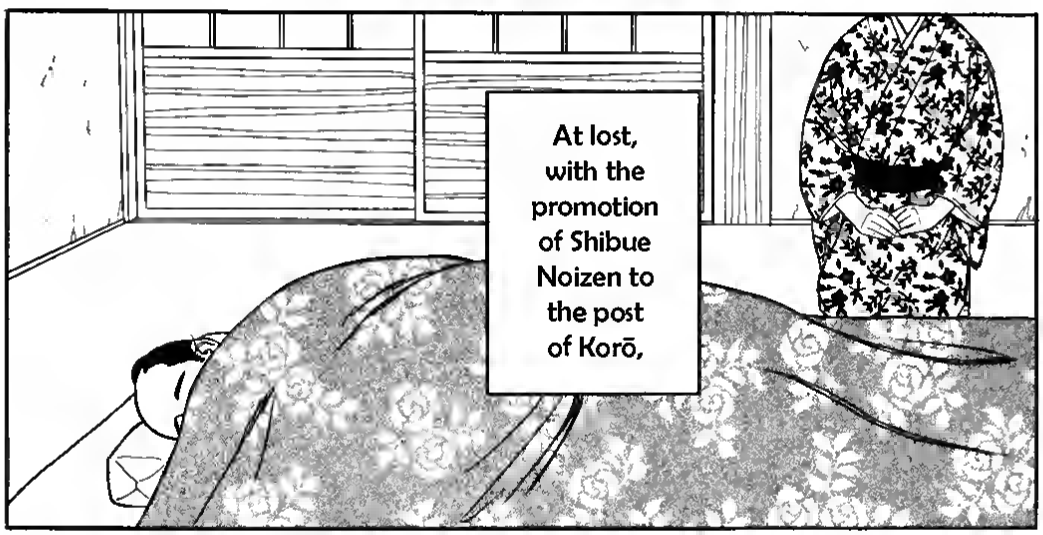
And its people...
The land...
It seems everything... has changed...
Oh how I long for that bygone era of my youth...
For the sight beyond the ridge... To return to Hitachi...
Oh how I long...
I shall hereby carry out your execution.

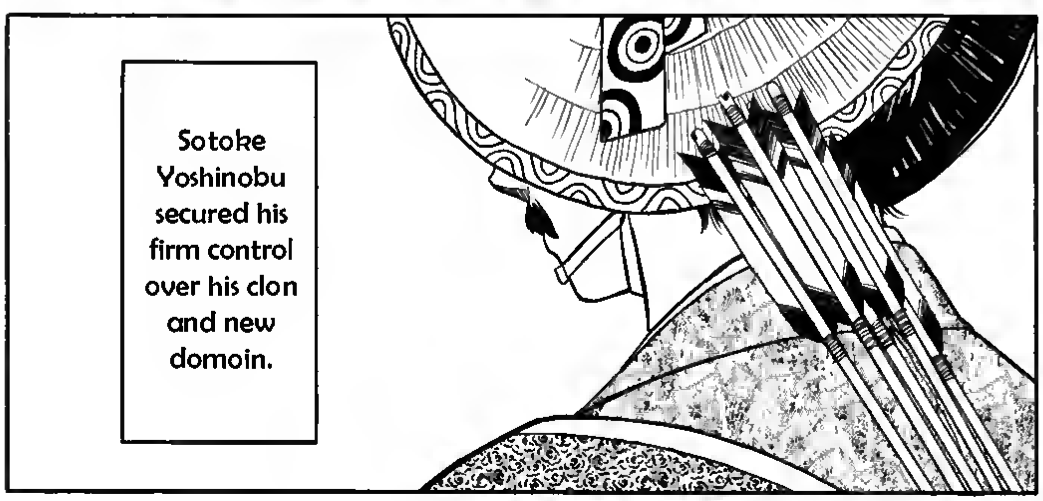
...Yes, it is best that you return.


Under accusations of a plot to assassinate Shibue Naizen, the Karō Kawai Ise-no-Kami and three other retainers were executed at various places on the same day.




In hindsight, they con oll be seen os shoring the same underlying couse.
Wada and Onuki's retirement, Kawai and his fellows' executions, and Kajiwara's disappearance...


At lost, with the promotion of Shibue Noizen to the post of Korō,


Sotoke Yoshinobu secured his firm control over his clon and new domoin.

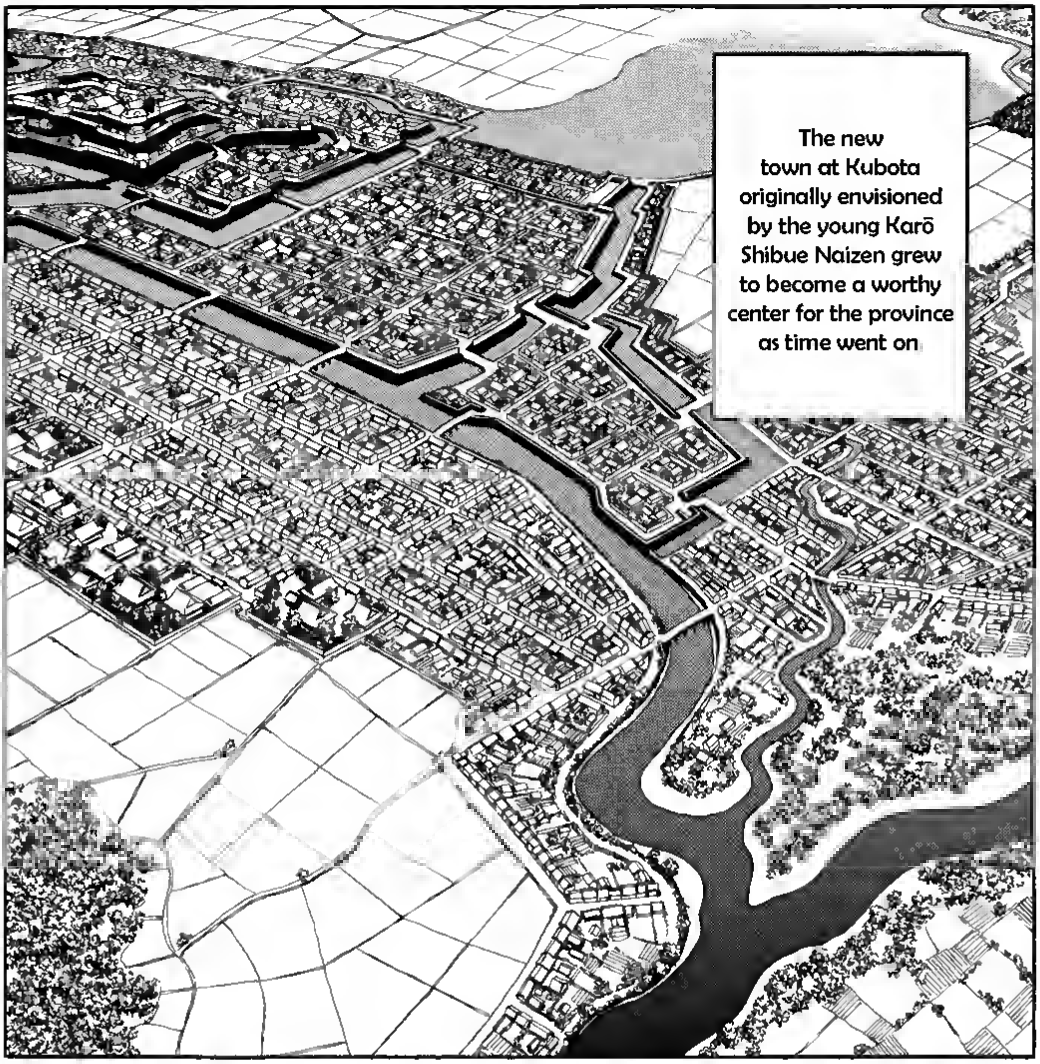
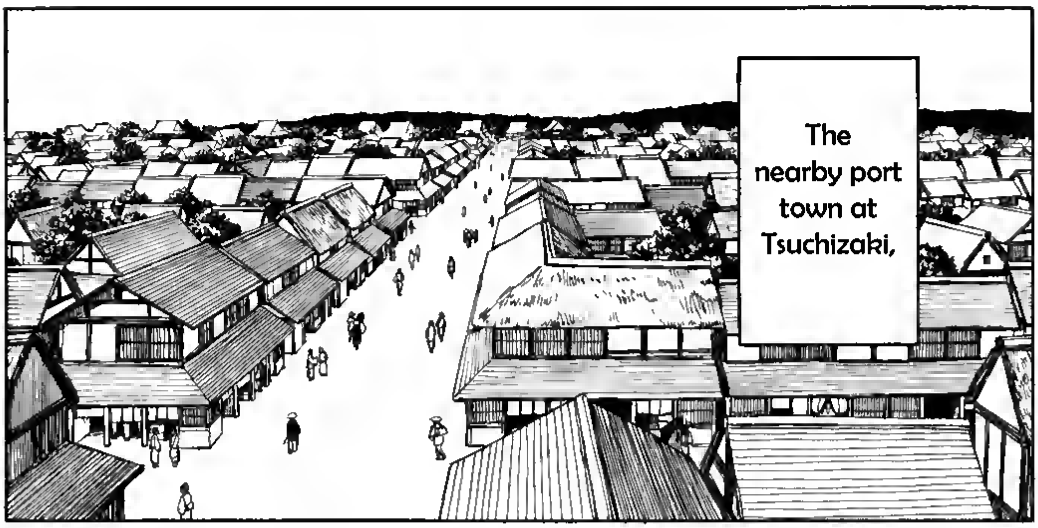
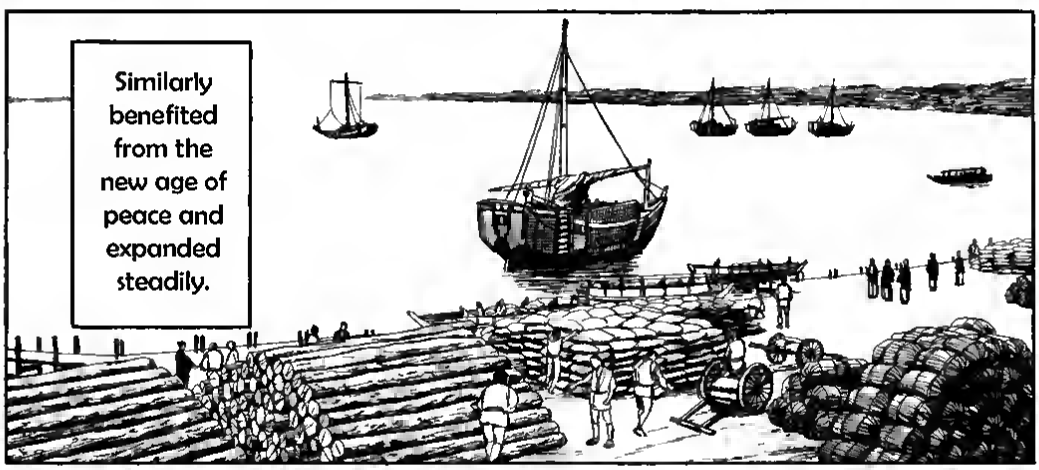
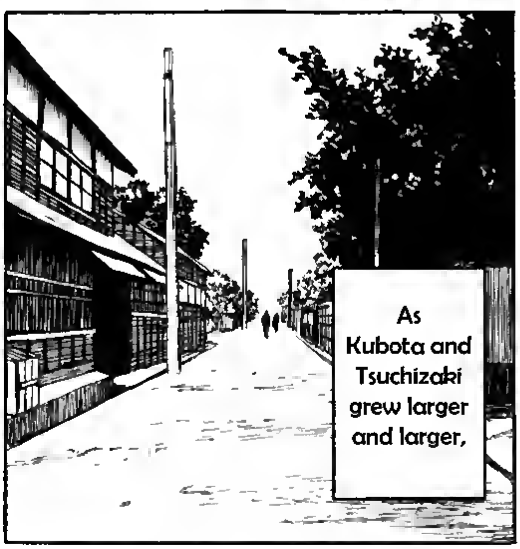

The new town at Kubota originally envisioned by the young Karō Shibue Naizen grew to become a worthy center for the province as time went on.

*Plate reads "Kubota province"

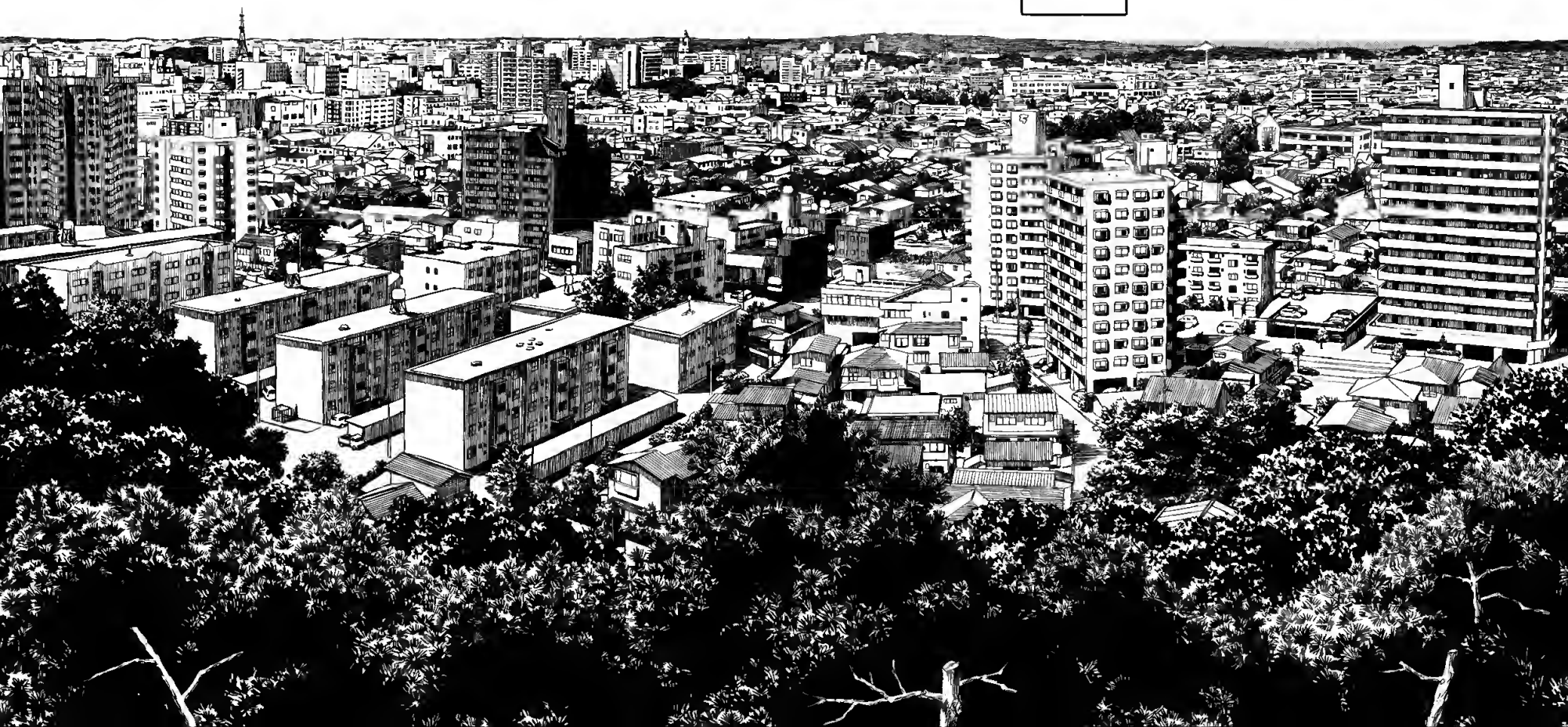

The nearby port town at Tsuchizaki,


Similarly benefited from the new age of peace and expanded steadily.

The once separate towns eventually merged as one.


As Kubota and Tsuchizaki grew larger and larger,

It is known to us in the modern-day as Akita city.



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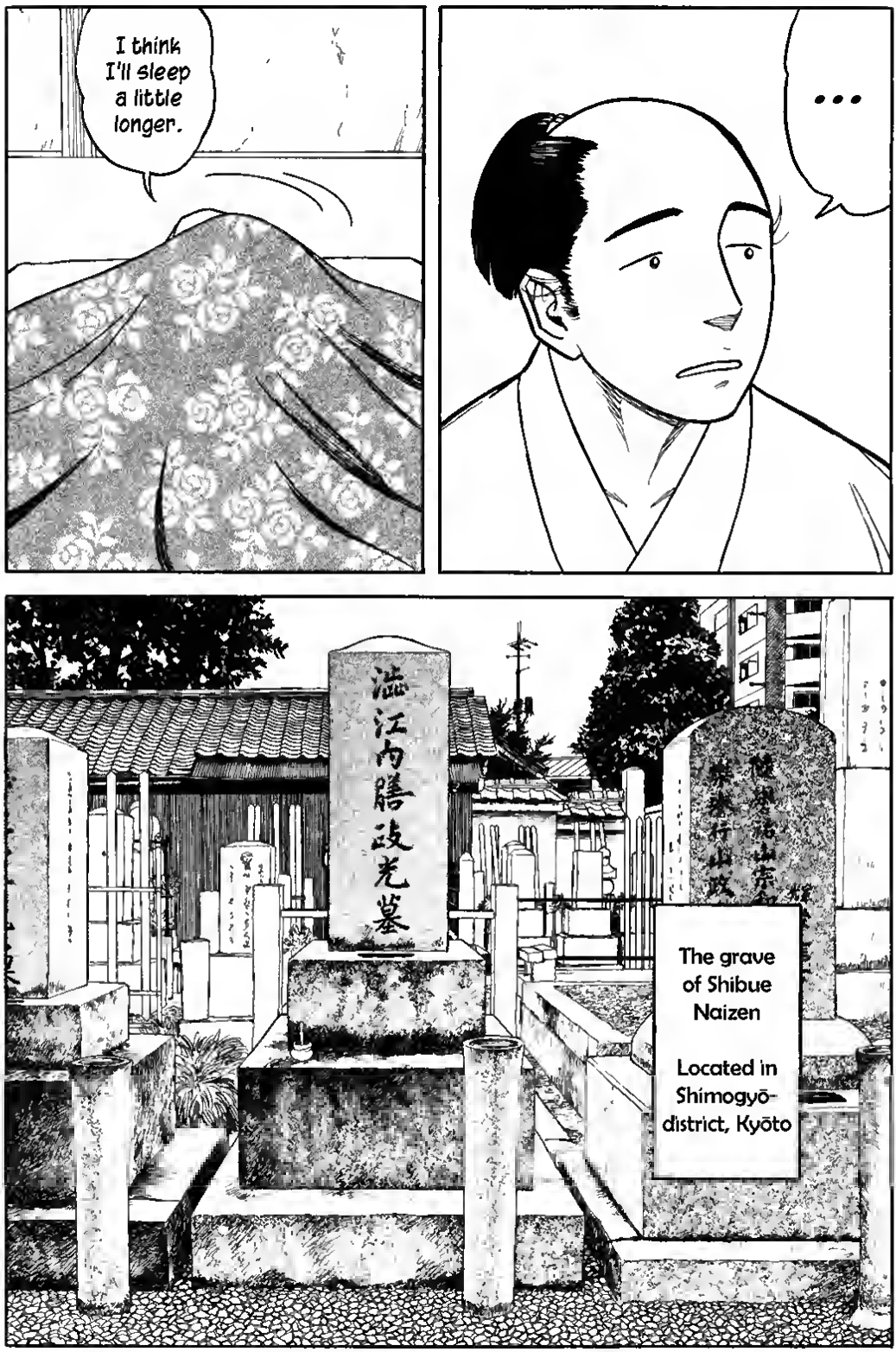

Snow Ridge / End

Snow Ridge, Sword Dance

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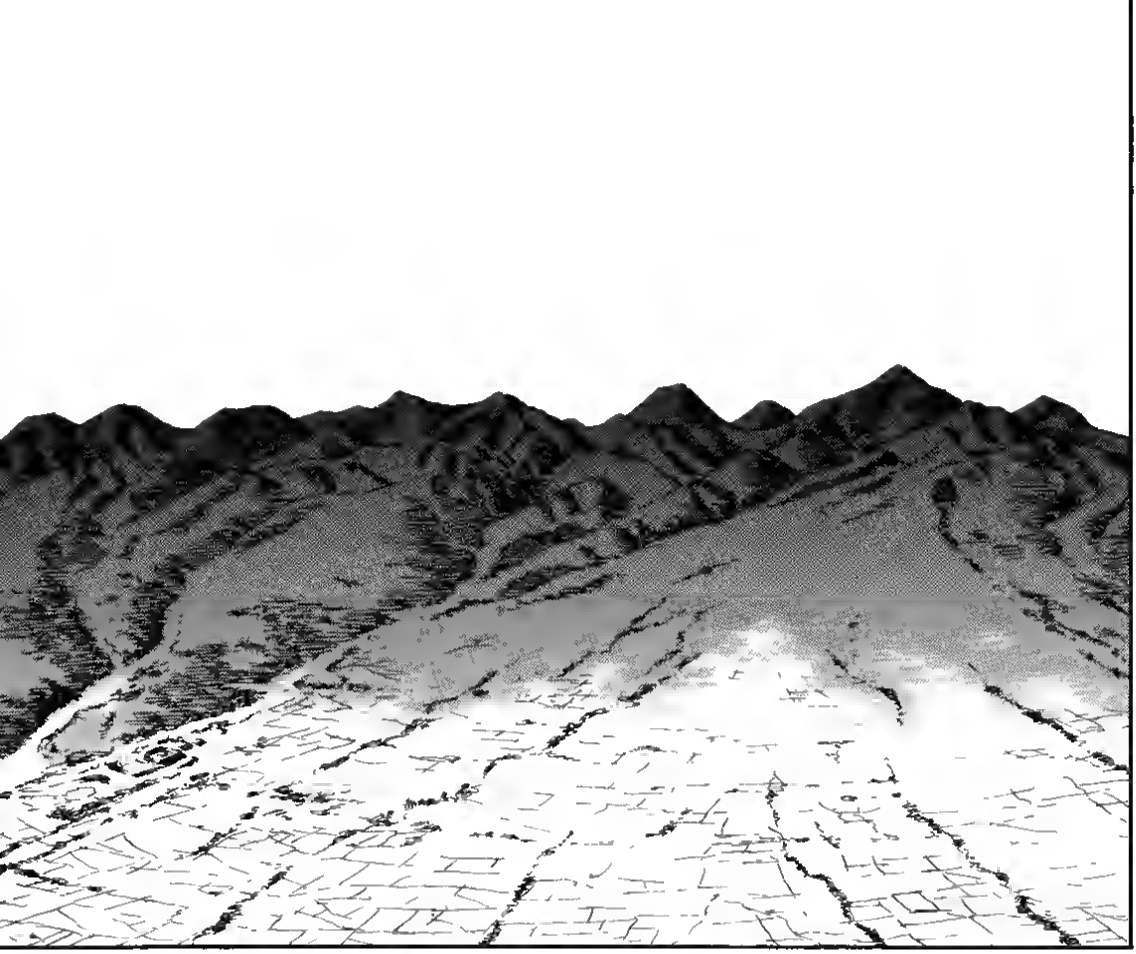
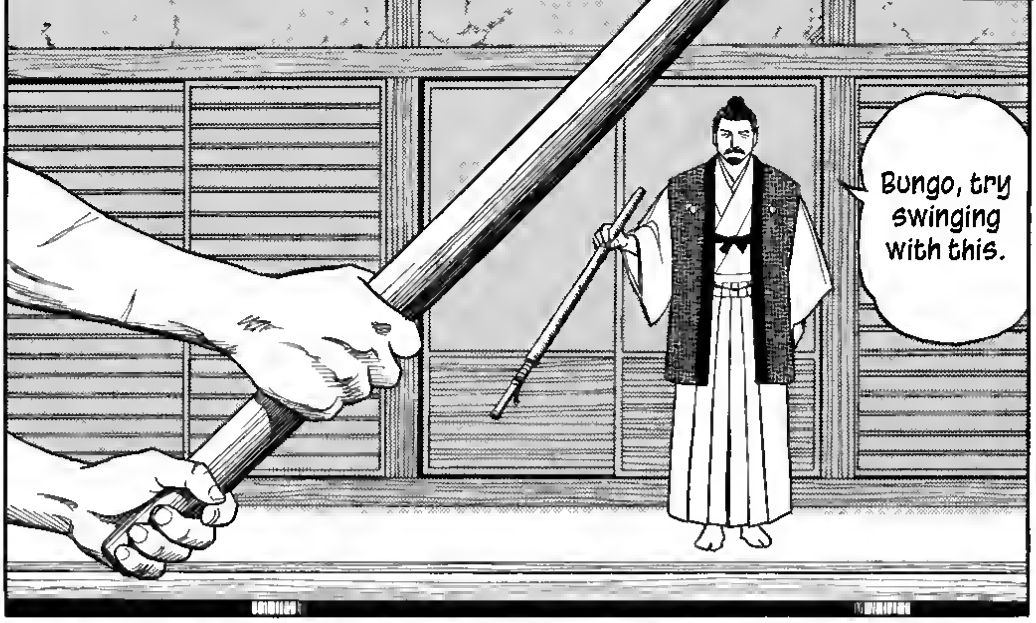
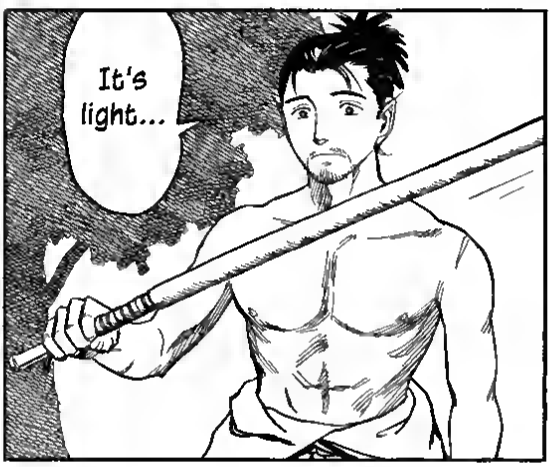
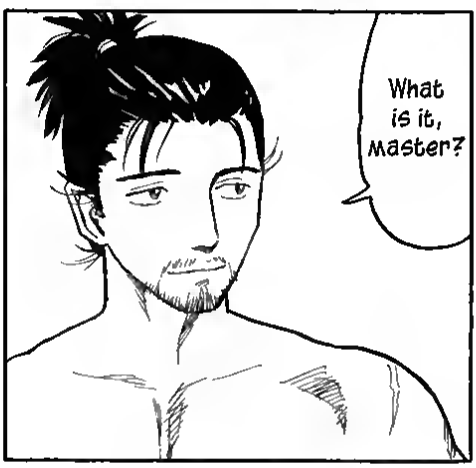
Sword Dance
Chapter 1: Gold Coin

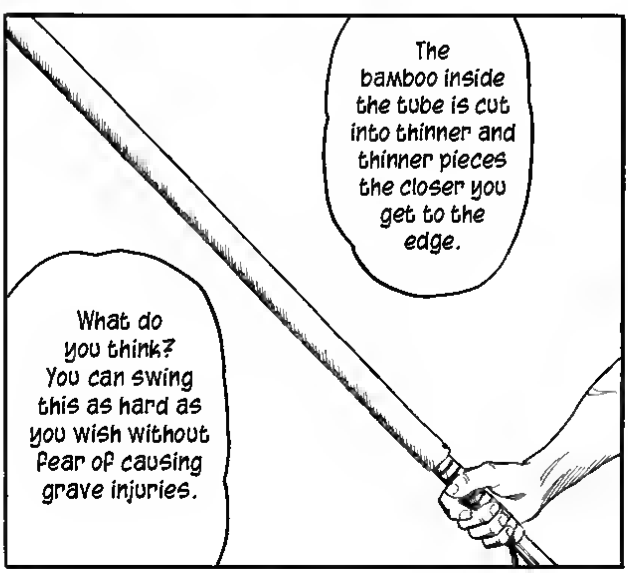


Hah!

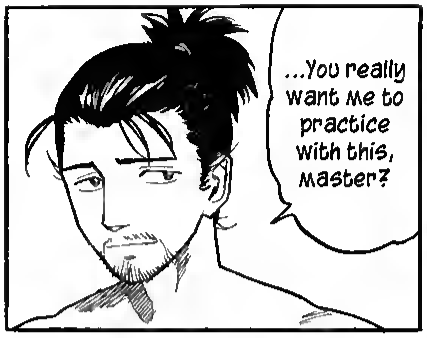

Bungo, try swinging with this.

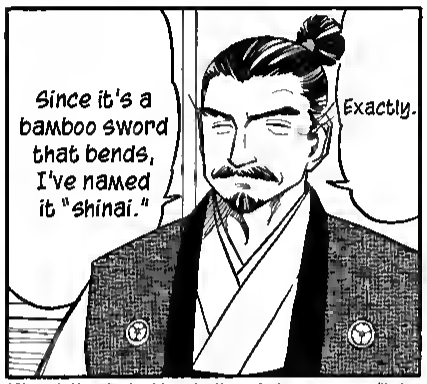

It's light...


What is it, master?

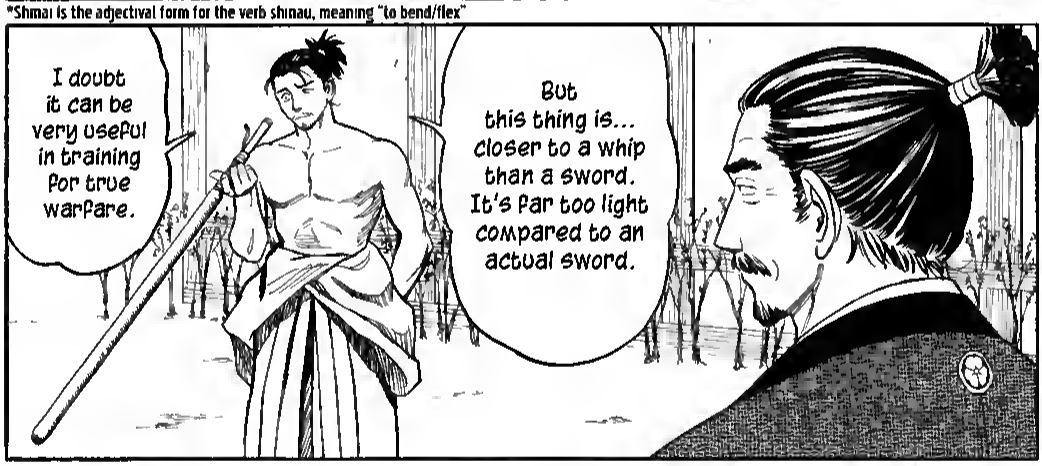

The bamboo inside the tube is cut into thinner and thinner pieces the closer you get to the edge.
What do you think? You can swing this as hard as you wish without fear of causing grave injuries.

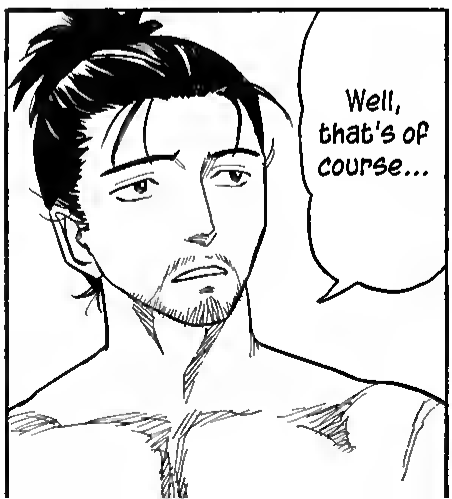
It's something I've come up with.

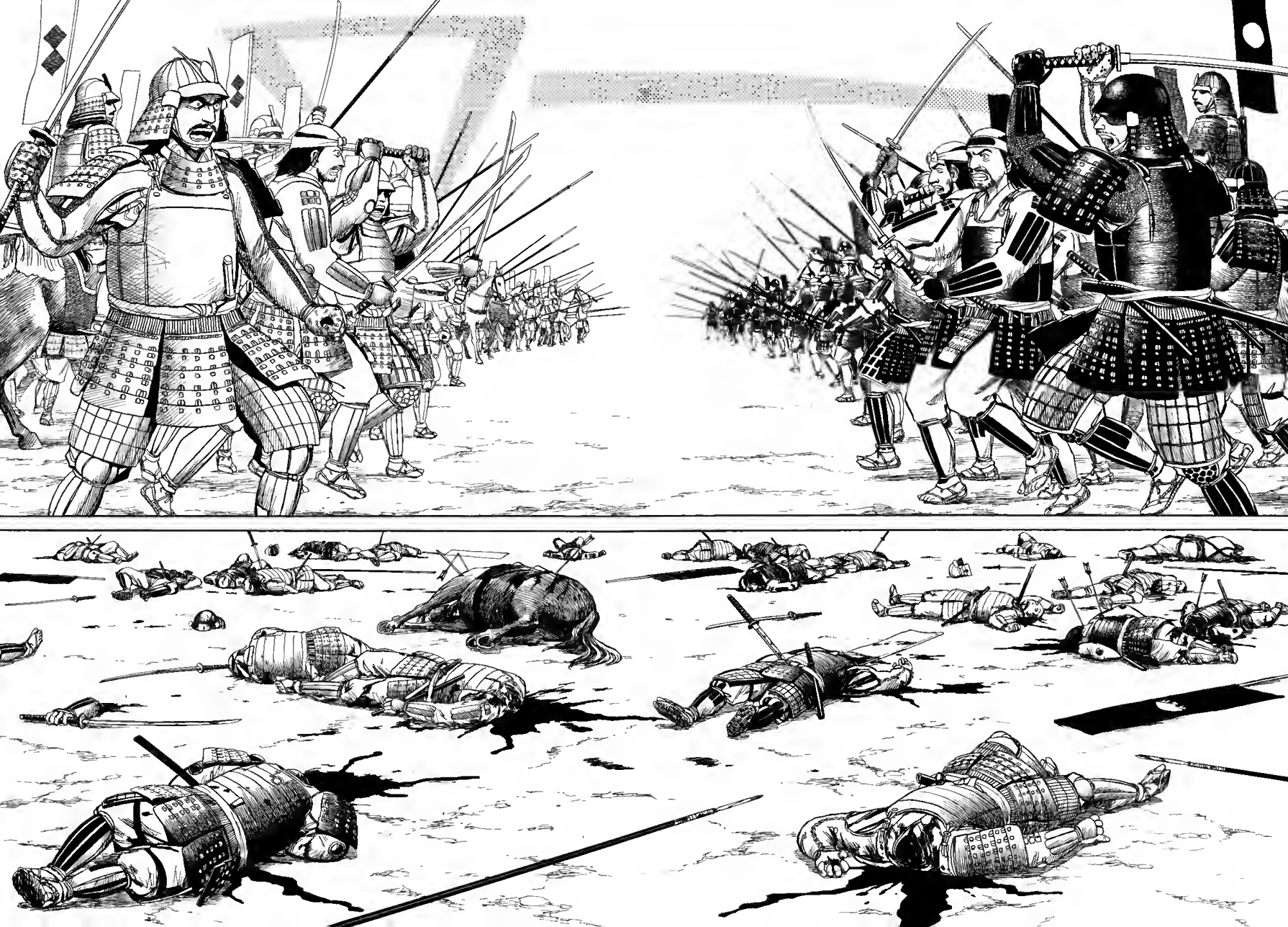


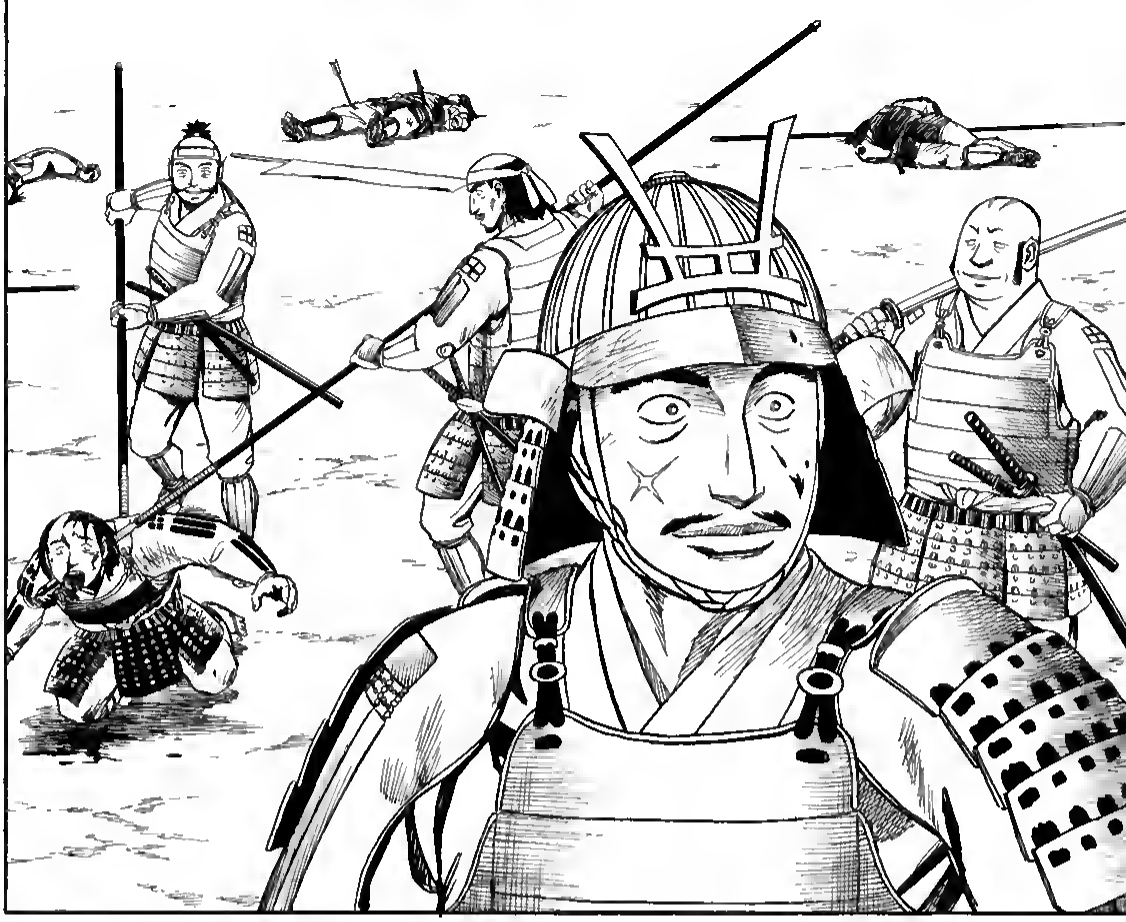


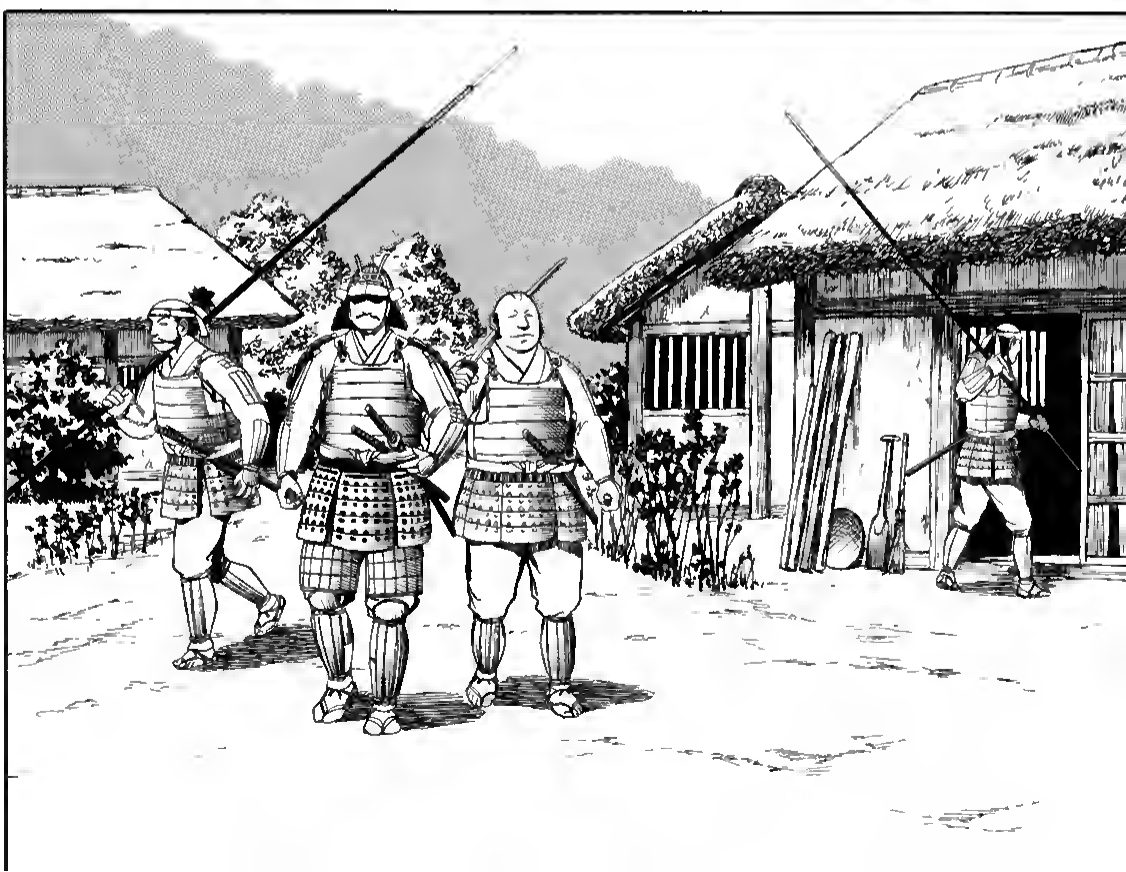
*Shinai is the adjectival form for the verb shinau, meaning "to bend/flex"

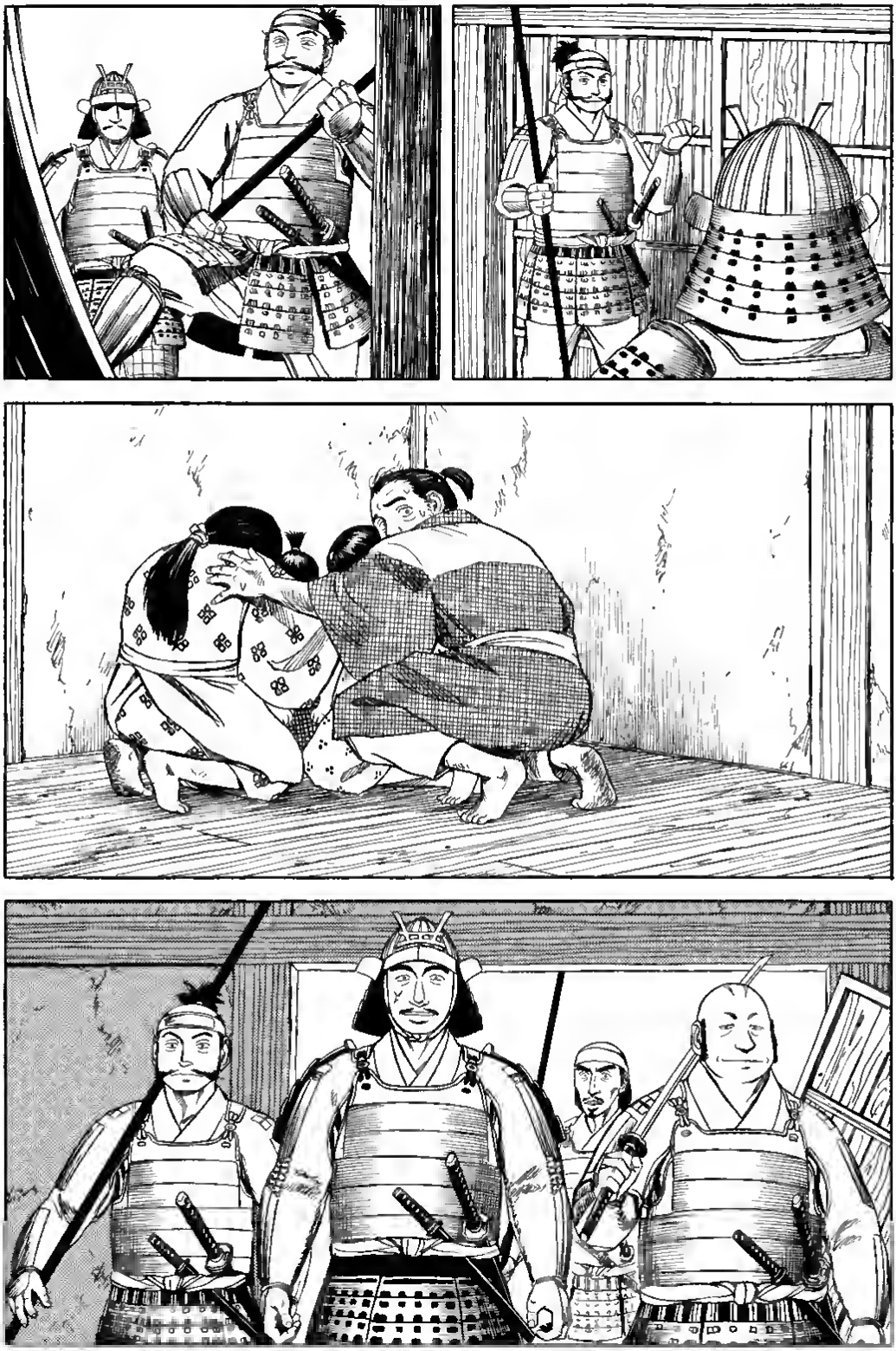

I doubt it can be very useful in training for true warfare.
But this thing is... closer to a whip than a sword. It's far too light compared to an actual sword.

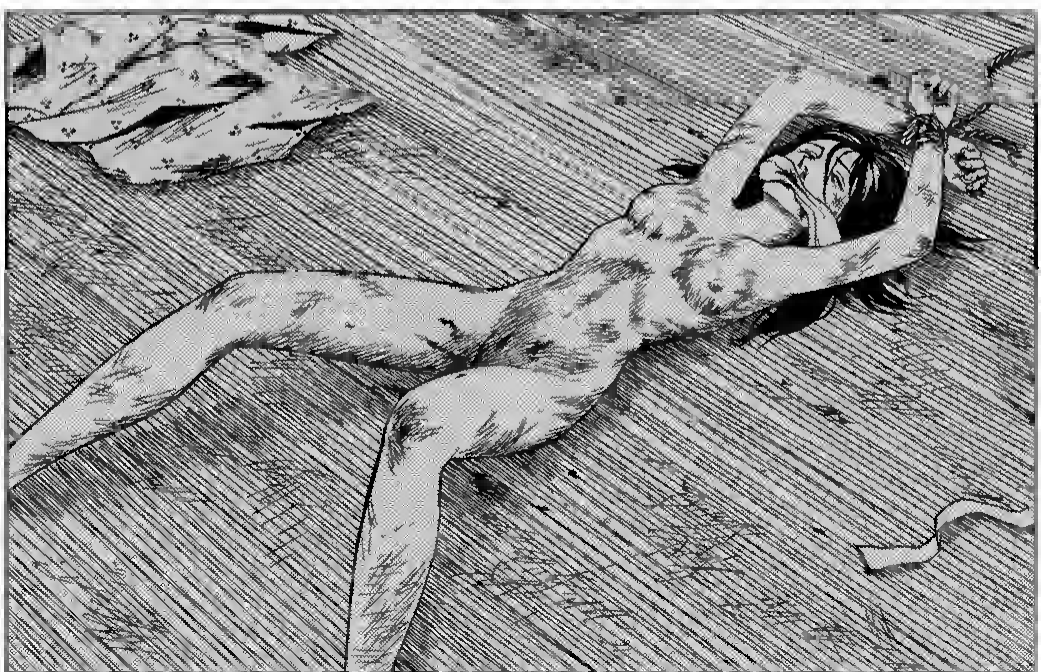


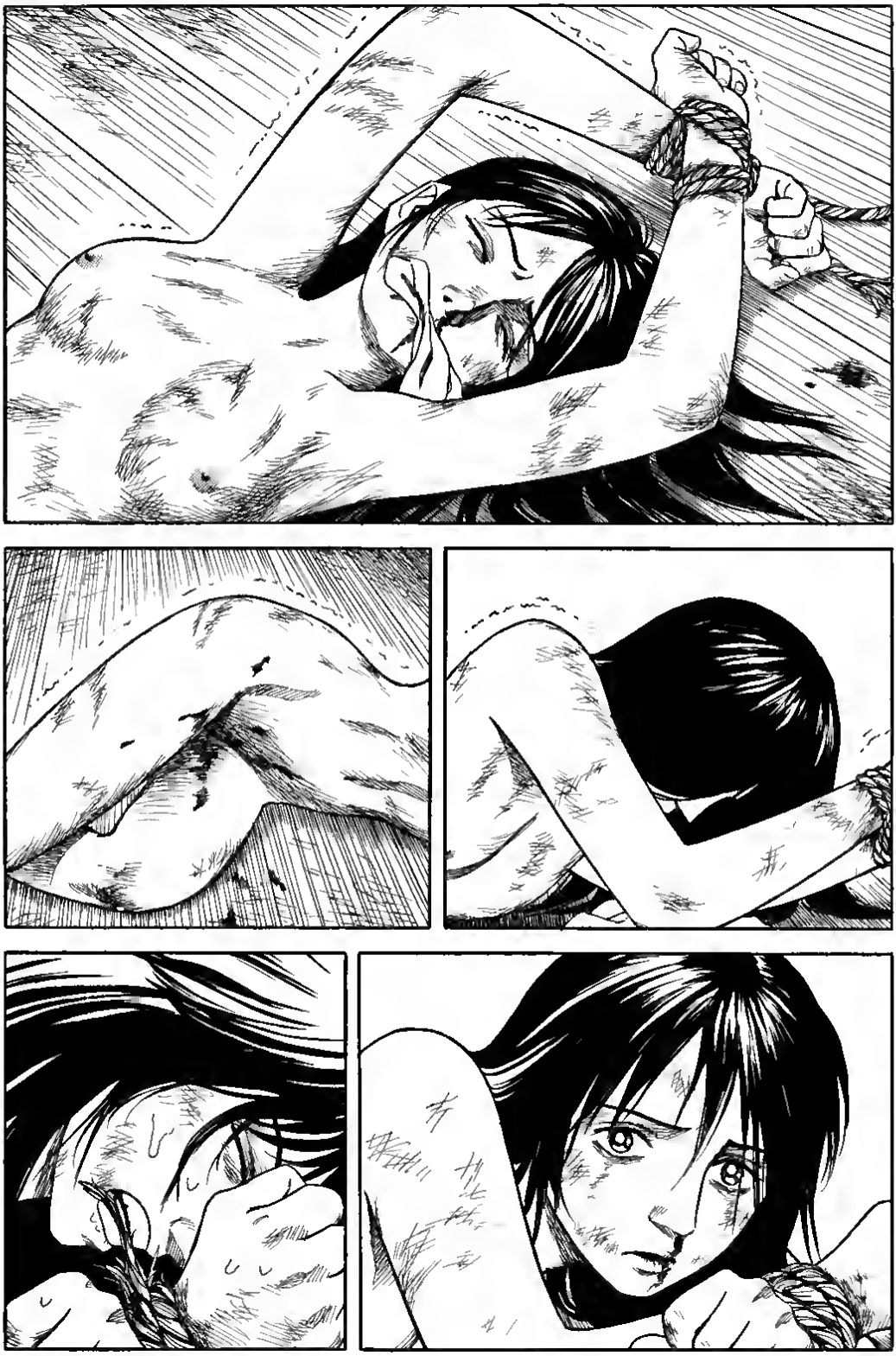








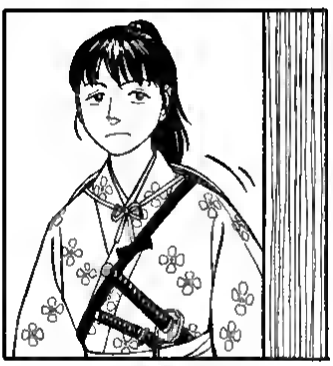


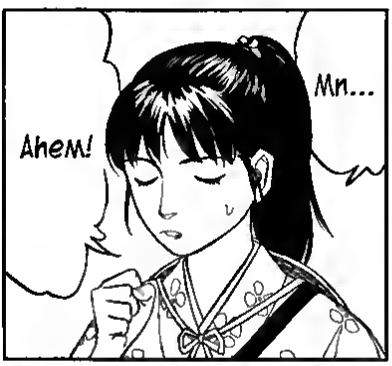


かかー

...

Eek!

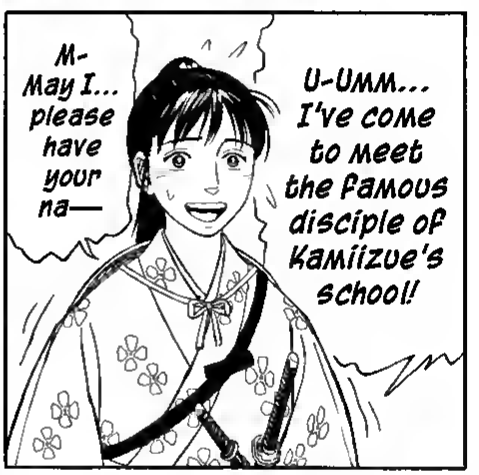



Ahem!
Mn...

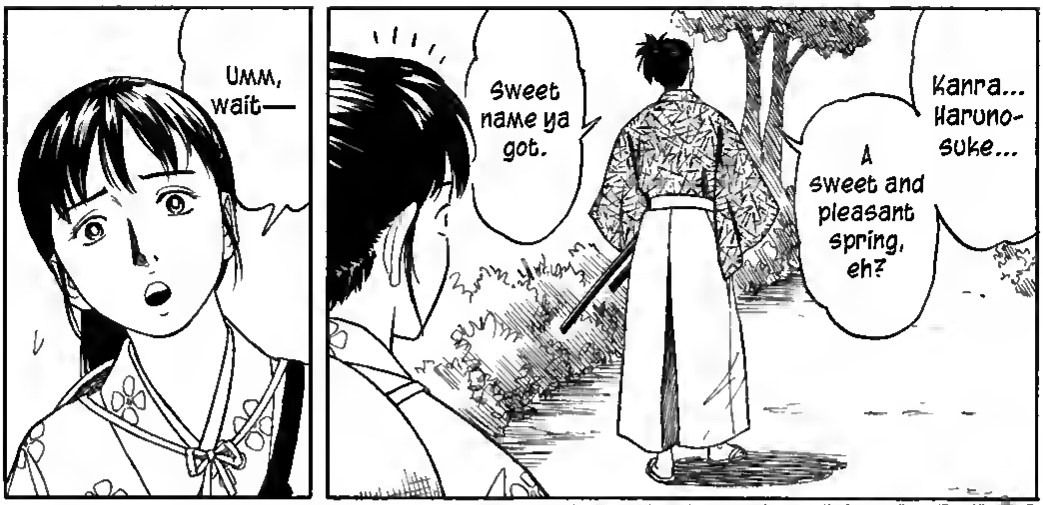
...
?

Ugh... Why're only these intimidating brutes here...
Oh... This won't do at all...
!
'ey, you there!
What ya loitterin' 'round 'ere for!?
There he is...
Ah...
UMM... I-I-I'M...

keep up the good work.
Yes,
All the brutes bowed at him...
He must be a prodigy of this school!
He must be...



*the -suke ending denotes a male name



*Kan in Kenre end Heru in Herunesuke respectively mean "sweet" end "spring."

*-same respectiui honeriiic, usually for those ei higher social standing than the speaker

Of course, you will be handsomely paid.
I simply wish to learn some basic but still effective swordsmanship techniques!
Like that even exists! Can't believe you even made a stupid nickname for it.
I'll give you a whole bag of 'em if you teach me swords-manship.
Goishikin coins!? Is this real...?
How's this?
What!? I beg of you, master!
There will be war soon but... I must admit I would like even a little more gold before then...
I de-cline.
No—

*Gold coins used in the Sengoku period whose shape resembled stone pieces in go (go-ishi), hence the name goishikin (kin means gold)

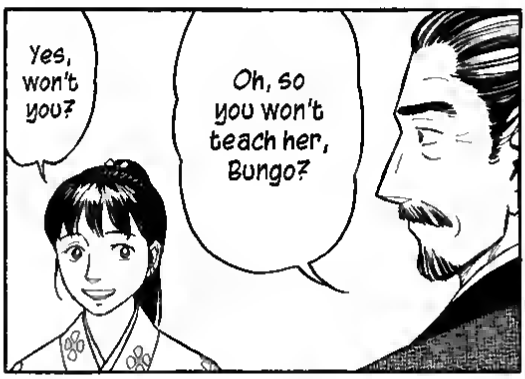
The others all look like brutish monsters ...!
No, it has to be you, master!
There's plenty of other people!
Why you gotta ask me in the first place?
...
Hikita-sama...
Well?
As if! You didn't even know my name before I told you!
In the coming year, or maybe even this year, Takeda will invade with his great army... My master is a vassal of the Nagano clan, and we pupils must follow him to the defense of the province.
Look. I know there must be some extraordinary circumstances as to why a girl is going around posing as a man and wanting to learn swords-manship.
But to be honest, I really don't have the time to spare.

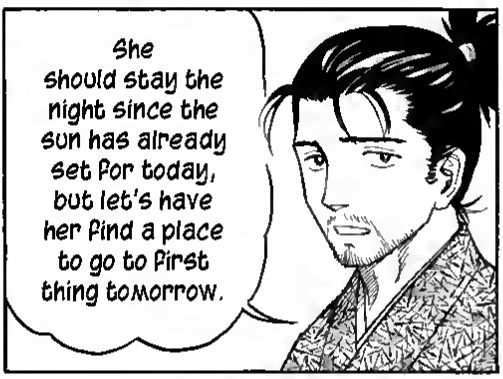
With that much gold, a girl like you can peacefully live out her days somewhere safe.
Understand? I won't make any harsh judgments but you better throw away any bold desires.
...
So you see, I just don't have the time to politely teach a young girl how to wield a blade.
As expected of a master...
You realized I was a girl right away...
Well, duh! Who wouldn't!?
And that's not even my main point!
As...

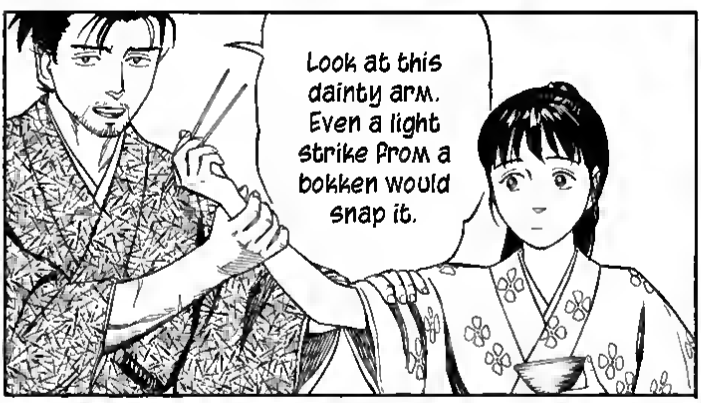
Ahh! You must be...!
This is...
Good evening, Bungo.
Hm? Who's that?
I see...
My name is Kanra Harunosuke!
Master Kamiizumi Ise-no-Kami! You're famed throughout the lands for your swordsmanship!
So you want to be Bungorō's disciple, do you?
Hahaha!

You have an excellent eye, then!
Oh, so you'll settle for me...!?
Pretty impudent if you ask me!
Yes, I thought it would be rather impudent to ask you to teach me so I...
The world's best!?
He may even be the world's best already...
I may be biased as his teacher, but Hikita Bungorō has no peer among the pupils of my school!
Bun-sama?
Amazing... Bun-sama...
World's... Best...
As if!
Oh, is that so?
Are you joking, master? She is a girl!
What!?
But I have to say, you possess a rather feminine figure...

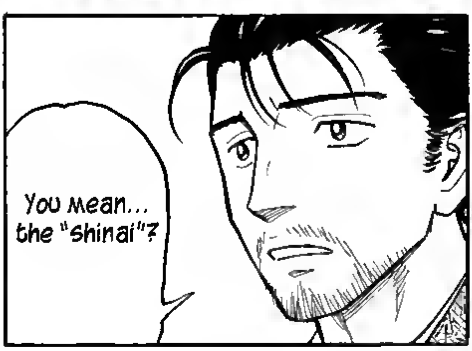
...
Aha haha!
Hahahaha!


Yes, won't you?
Oh, so you won't teach her, Bungo?


She should stay the night since the sun has already set for today, but let's have her find a place to go to first thing tomorrow.

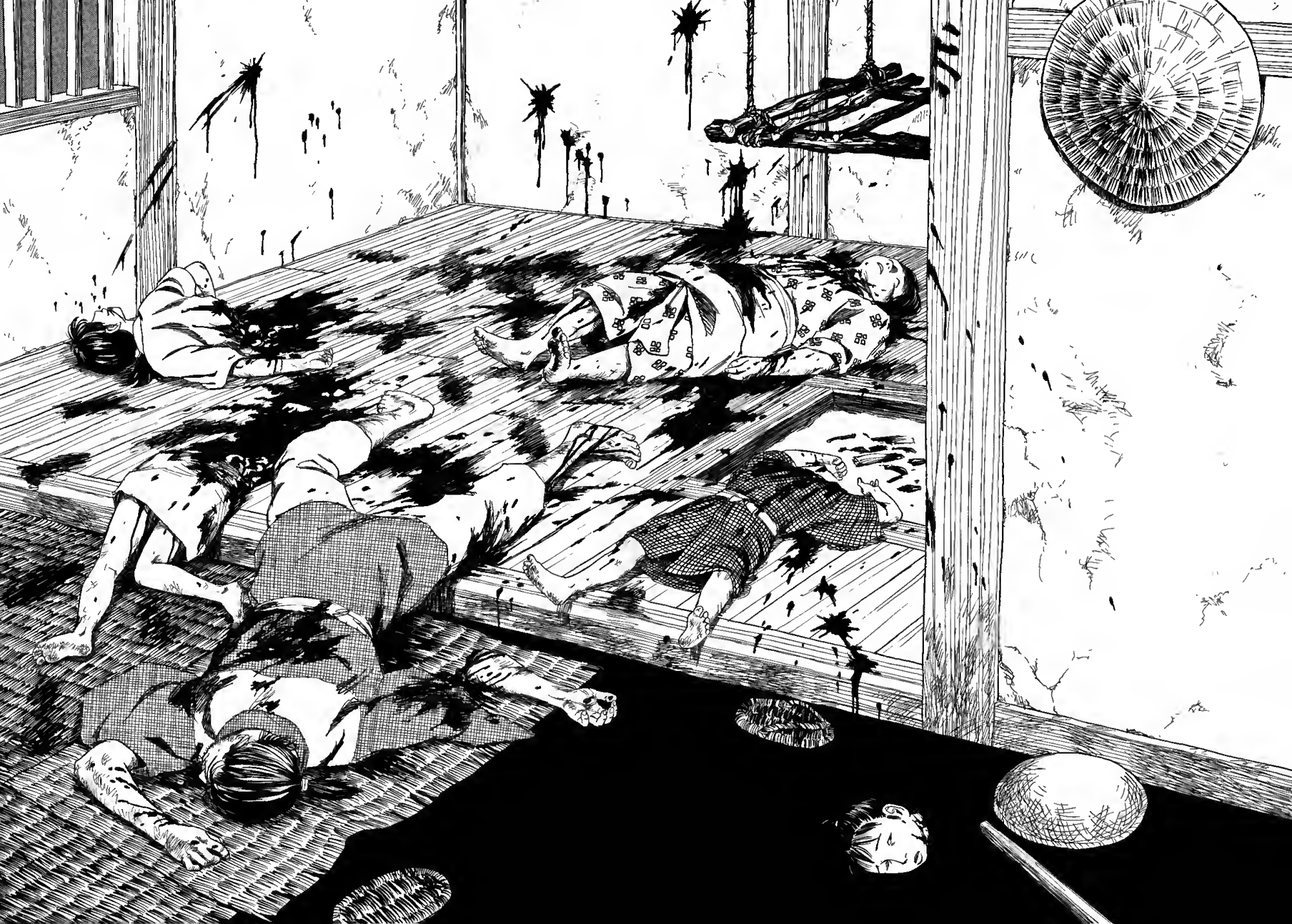

Look at this dainty arm. Even a light strike from a bokken would snap it.

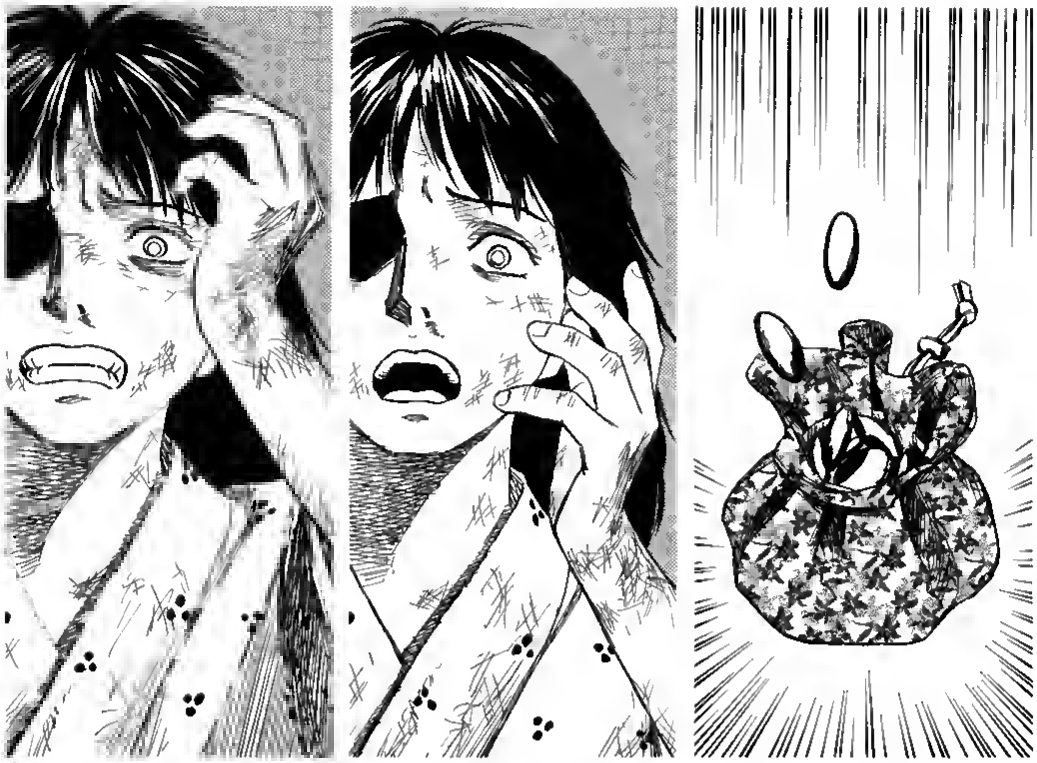
Master... Are you serious?


You mean... the "shinai"?

My new inven-tion...
Ha... Aren't you forgetting something?

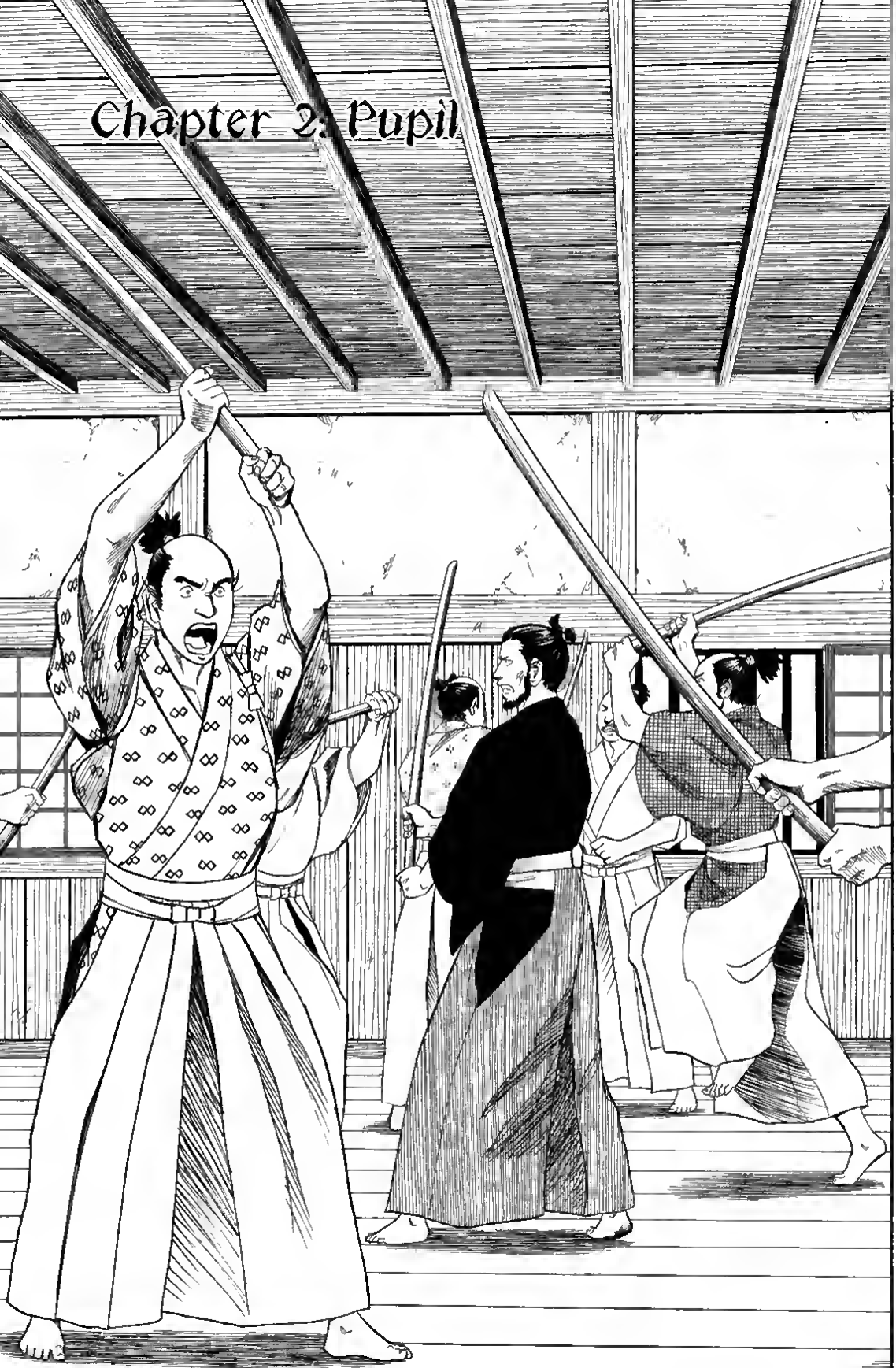
My head hurts...
Ugh...
Hee hee... I did it!

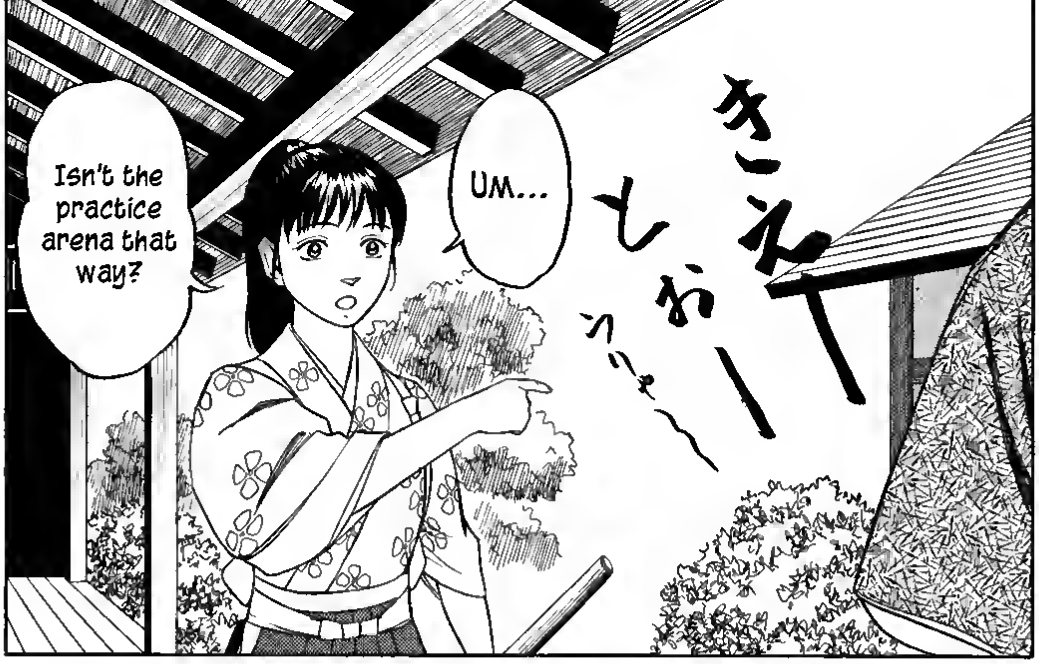




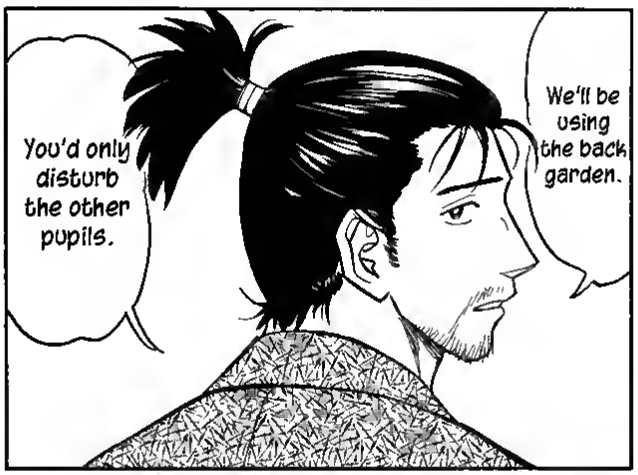
I'll find them and kill them!
I swear I'll find those savages...

Chapter 2: Pupil




Isn't the practice arena that way?
Um...
きこえてしまう

Aren't I a pupil too...?


You'd only disturb the other pupils.
We'll be using the back garden.

*Terrible can be a homenym with leg in Japanese

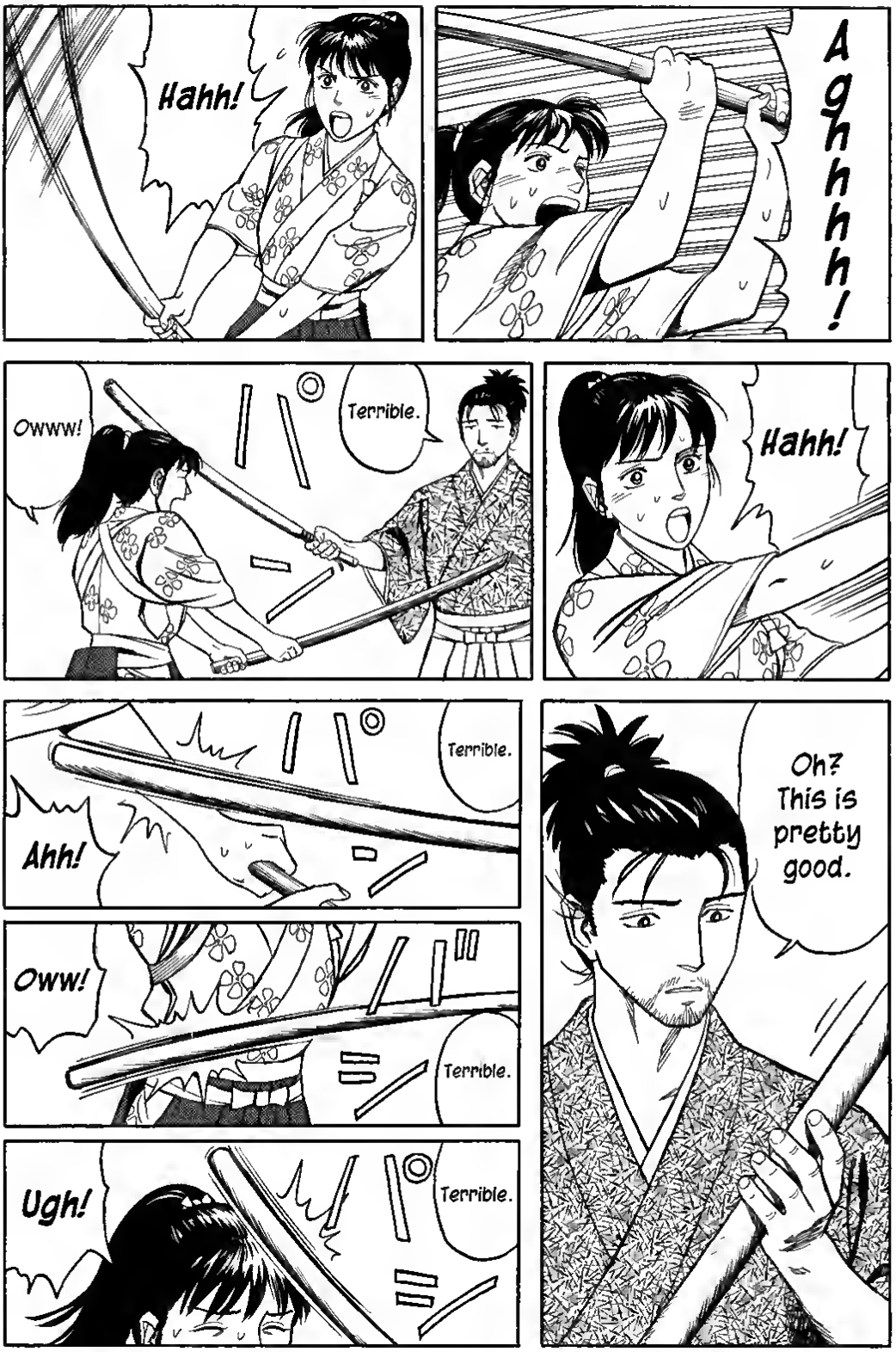
Agh, whatever.
In any case, just come at me!
With all your spirit!
You're fine with that bamboo pole?
It's called a shinai.
But don'cha worry 'bout me.
Come at me with killing intent!
Terrible.
Raahhhh!

Hahh!
Hahh!
Hahh!
Hahh!
...

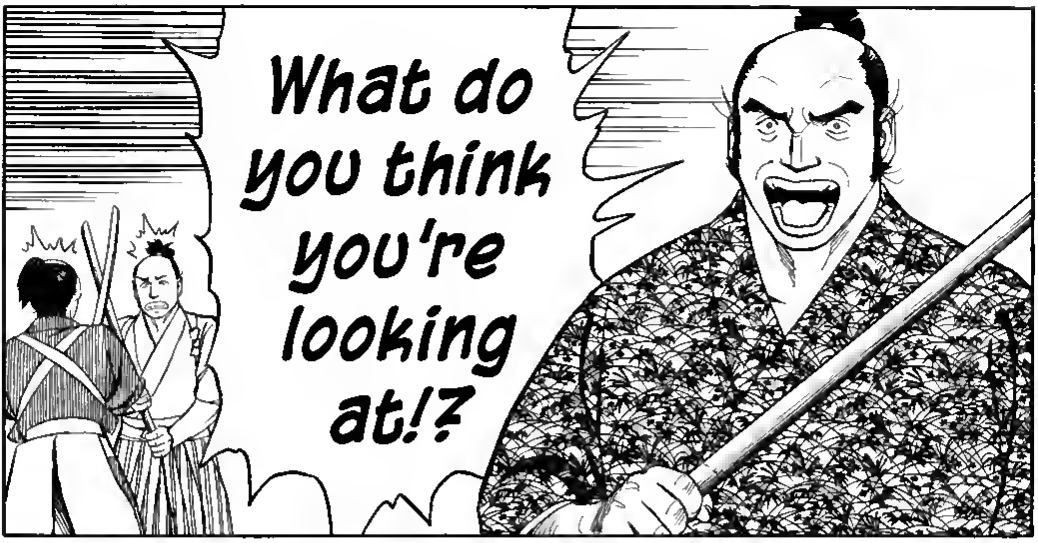
If so, attack with that end in mind.
...

Is it a means to some end?
Why do you wish to learn swords-man-ship?

Huff... huff... huff... huff...

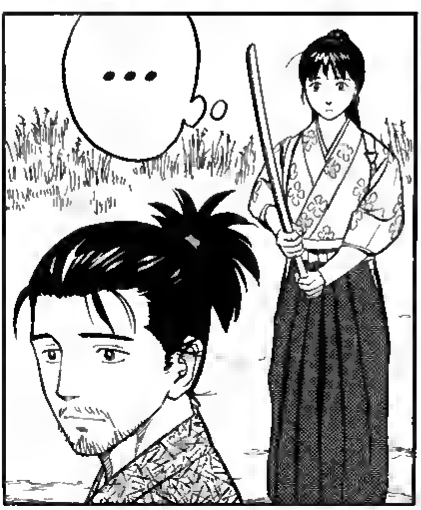

Hahh!
Aghhhh!
Owww!
Terrible.
Hahh!
Terrible.
Ahh!
Oh? This is pretty good.
Oww!
Terrible.
Ugh!
Terrible.

It should be the reverse.
Huff... huff...
...I'm not done yet!
Far too many superfluous movements... and too much energy exerted on a single stroke.
I'd love to switch places with him, heehee!
But his opponent's a mere girl. He should at least go a little easier on her.
Hmm... Hikita seems like he's having fun.


What do you think you're looking at!?

Jingo's voice sure is loud as usual.

Eek—

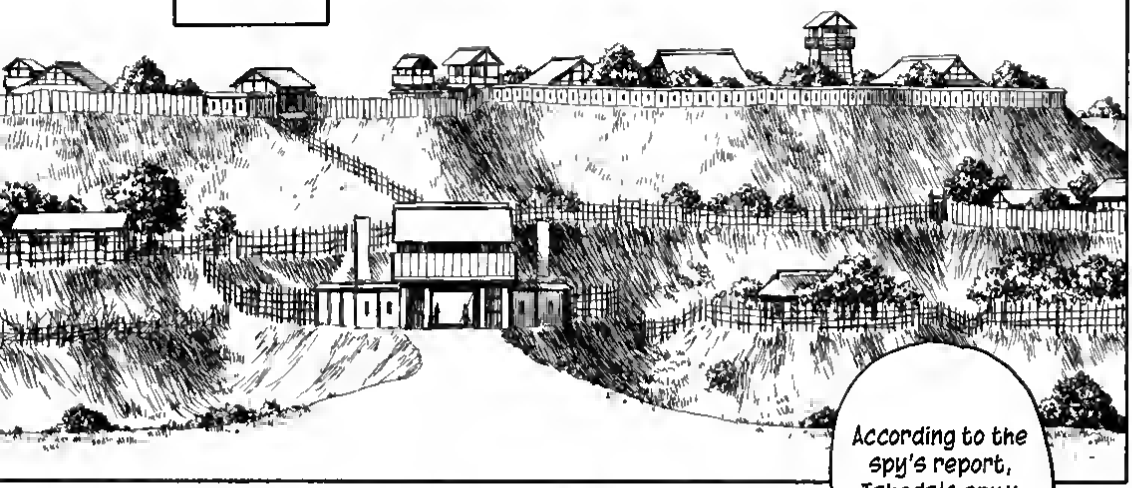

...

Are his students watching us that much?

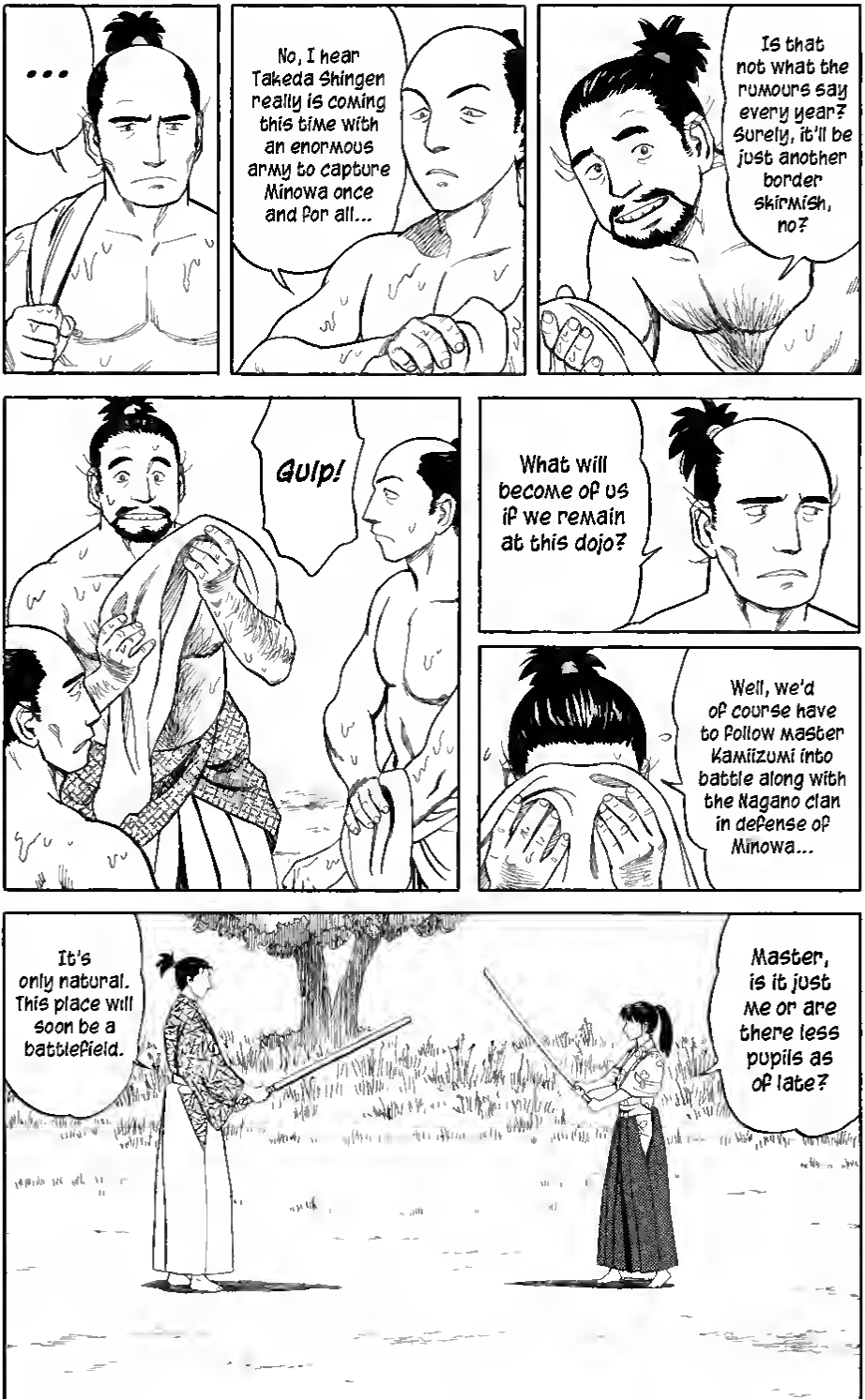
Terrible.
Opening spotted!
Don't raise your voice for surprise attacks.

Where's the practice sword?
Where is it...
All he did was call me terrible!
Nghh... Curses!
Let's end it here for today.
Huh?
You've got better spirit than I gave you credit for.

Nagano clan's Minowa Castle



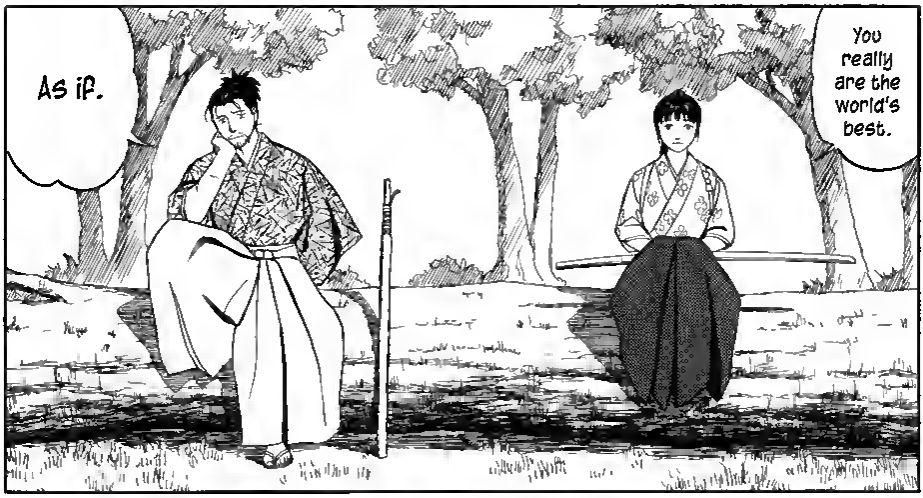
Gentle-men...
Steel your-selves!
The Takeda must have found out about our lord's passing and that his heir is young and inexperienced.
...
"Leave if you lack determi-nation," I see...
Did you hear? The tiger of Kai is coming at last...

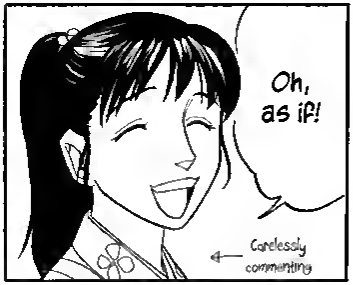

...
No, I hear Takeda Shingen really is coming this time with an enormous army to capture Minowa once and for all...
Is that not what the rumours say every year? Surely, it'll be just another border skirmish, no?
Gulp!
What will become of us if we remain at this dojo?
Well, we'd of course have to follow Master Kamiizumi into battle along with the Nagano clan in defense of Minowa...
It's only natural. This place will soon be a battlefield.
Master, is it just me or are there less pupils as of late?

You should hurry up and leave this place too.
...
Not only that, the battle's looking quite bleak for our forces this time.
Hmph!

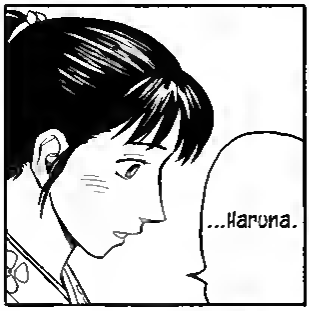
Doesn't seem that way to me.
I've hardly learned anything yet!
I refuse.
I can teach her fine without having to worry about injuries.
And a lot of that definitely has to do with this new shinai.
This girl's shown a considerable amount of growth in such a short period of time...

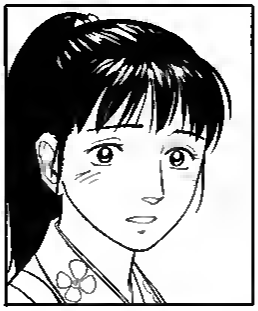
We polish our swordsmanship so as to put it to test on a real battlefield.
That is what a sword is for, is it not?
Bungorō-sama... Why do you fight?
My end...?
What ...?
But why do you put it to test? What is the end to your means?
Oww!
Hmm...
An open-ing!
My pur-pose, huh...

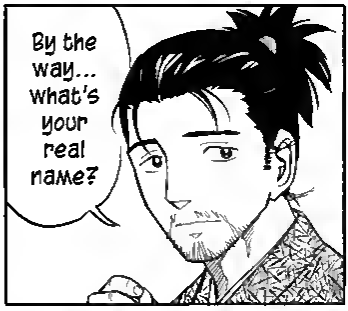

As if.
You really are the world's best.


Oh, as if!
Carelessly commenting

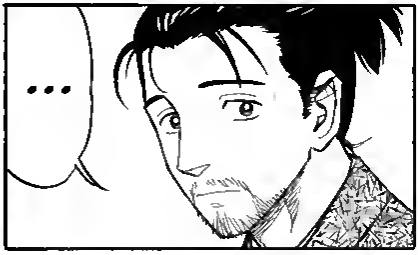
I do not even measure up to his feet.
The world's best is Master Kamiizumi... That is no mere rumour, I assure you.


...Haruna.




By the way... what's your real name?

Joking again, I see...


...

Mt. Haruna

Prepa-
rations
for war,
everywhere
you look...

No,
I'll help
garrison
the castle
too!

Why!?

The students
of our school
are set to
help garrison
the castle's
defenses.
You should
leave here
while you
still can.

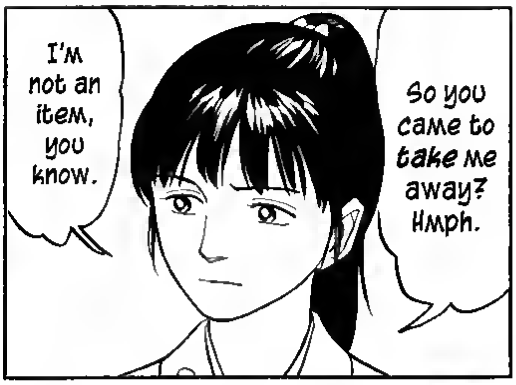
...
Haruna!
Because Takeda forces...
You're... Haruna, aren't you!?
Yokichi...

Chapter 3: True Warfare

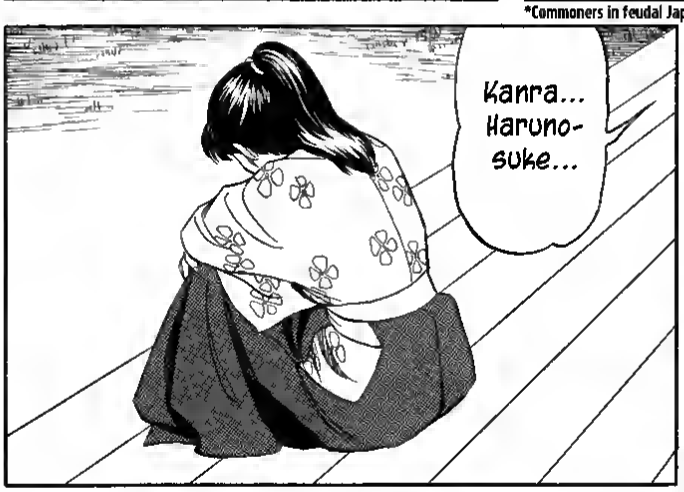
Leave me alone!
You think a girl like you can become a samurai or something!?
Haruna... What do you think you're playing at?
!
That your mother, father, grandmother, and all your siblings were killed!
You do know, don't you!?
Yes, I know!
When I came back home on that night, my family had already been slaughtered!
What...!?
N-no! You're wrong, Yokichi!
!!
They were killed because you stole the gold!

They were killed right after I was abducted-ed!
Was already half dried by then...
Their blood...
Those disgusting sons of bitches!
So that's how it was...
It's the truth! That's why... That's Why I'm going to seek them out and...
...
T-this here is, umm... My master! Master Bungorō!
Yokichi!
Not only did they kill your family, they kidnapped you so they could r—

Wouldn't that be Kamiizumi Ise-no-Kami?
World's best...?
He's the world's best swordsman!
Well, umm... Nice to meet you, Yokichi.
Don't be rude!
Oh, so we have two number 1 swordsmen, do we? Well, I guess we can depend Minowa blindfolded now.
Umm... Well, Master Bungorō's amazing too!
The samurai that attacked our village are desperately trying to find her right now! Thanks to how rare those gold coins she's stolen are, I managed to find some clues to her whereabouts.
And it looks like I've beaten them to her, luckily enough.
You seem to be from the same hometown as Haruna, so what brings you here to Minowa?
To find and take her someplace safe, of course.

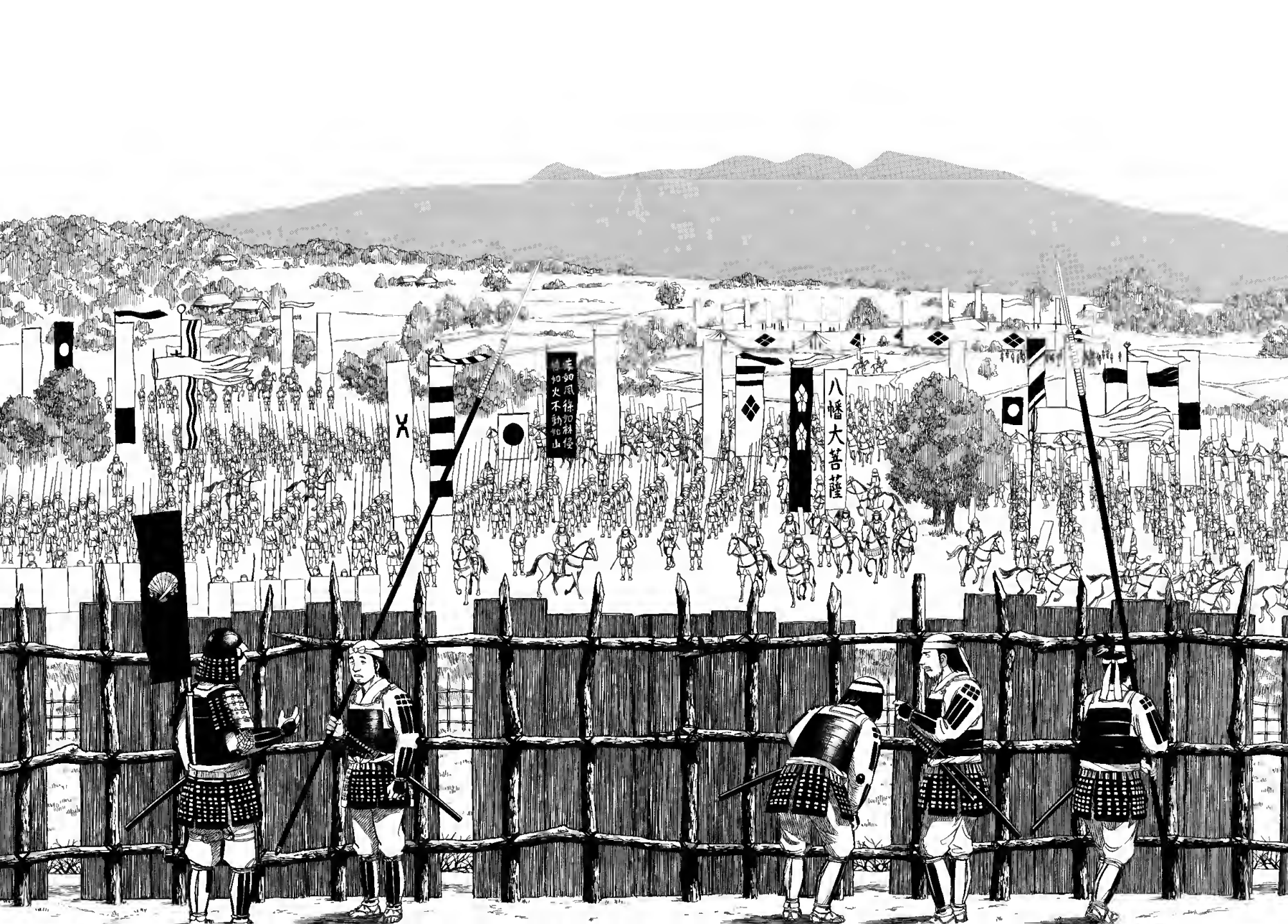


*Commoners in feudal Japan usually did not have surnames



What was the name of the man who attacked your house?
I don't know... They could have been Obata's samurai... Or mercenaries for Takeda's army...
I heard the fief of Kanra was under the control of Obata Kazusa-no-Suke, who recently turned his back on the Nagano and joined the Takeda...
You're seriously planning to find those men from Takeda's enormous 20,000-strong army? ...It's absurd.
You were fortunate enough to find a former neighbour willing to take you in, so you should—
Master Bungorō...
But I know I can identify them from any crowd...
That's why I'll defend the castle too!
Now's not the right time. A war between two armies is set to erupt shortly.

...No.
Do you... hate me?
Hmm?
...
That's... good...


疾如風徐如林侵
如火不動如山
八幡大菩薩

Not even a single ant could exit the castle now!
Shingen does not disappoint!
How can one not marvel at the glorious stage that Shingen has laid out to honour our life's final struggle?
Hahaha, why not!?
Fujii! Now's not the time to be impressed!
I do not intend to die before Shingen...
Yes, but...
Do you not agree as well, Kamiizumi?

...
Ahahahaha!
I see Shingen is not the only one who fails to disappoint! Such words befit the greatest swordsman in the world!
Yes, sir!
At your service, sir!
Jingo!
Bungo!

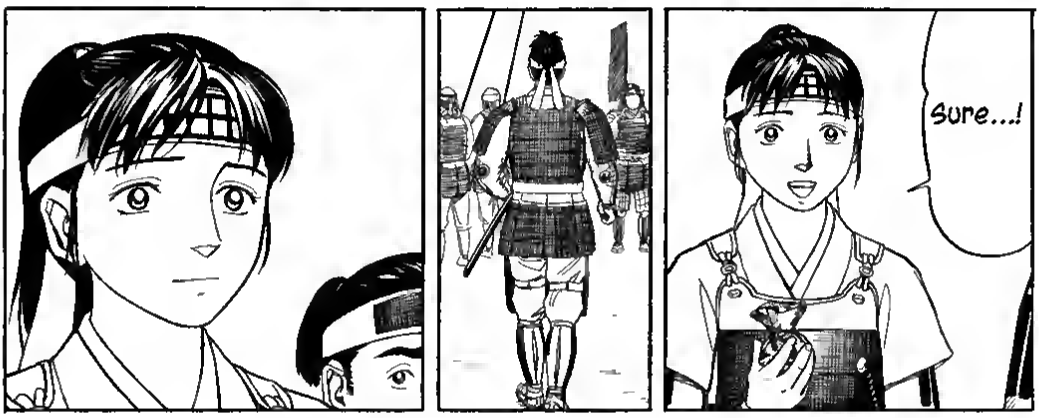
Make sure to go full-out! We'll stir up the enemy lines!
We are stationed at the castle's rear gates, from where we will sally forth and cause a sufficient distraction to allow the main forces at the front gates to strike as well!
Stir them... With our blades...
As in, break them up?
Stir up?
Bungo... Whether or not this castle falls, this will be the last duty I carry out in service of the Nagano clan.
Master...
...
Pardon?
We may know how to use a sword... But what do we know of true warfare?

Yes, Master!
So if we survive today... Let the shinai be our weapon from then on.
Kamiizumi's unit!
Master Bungorō!!
Form File!

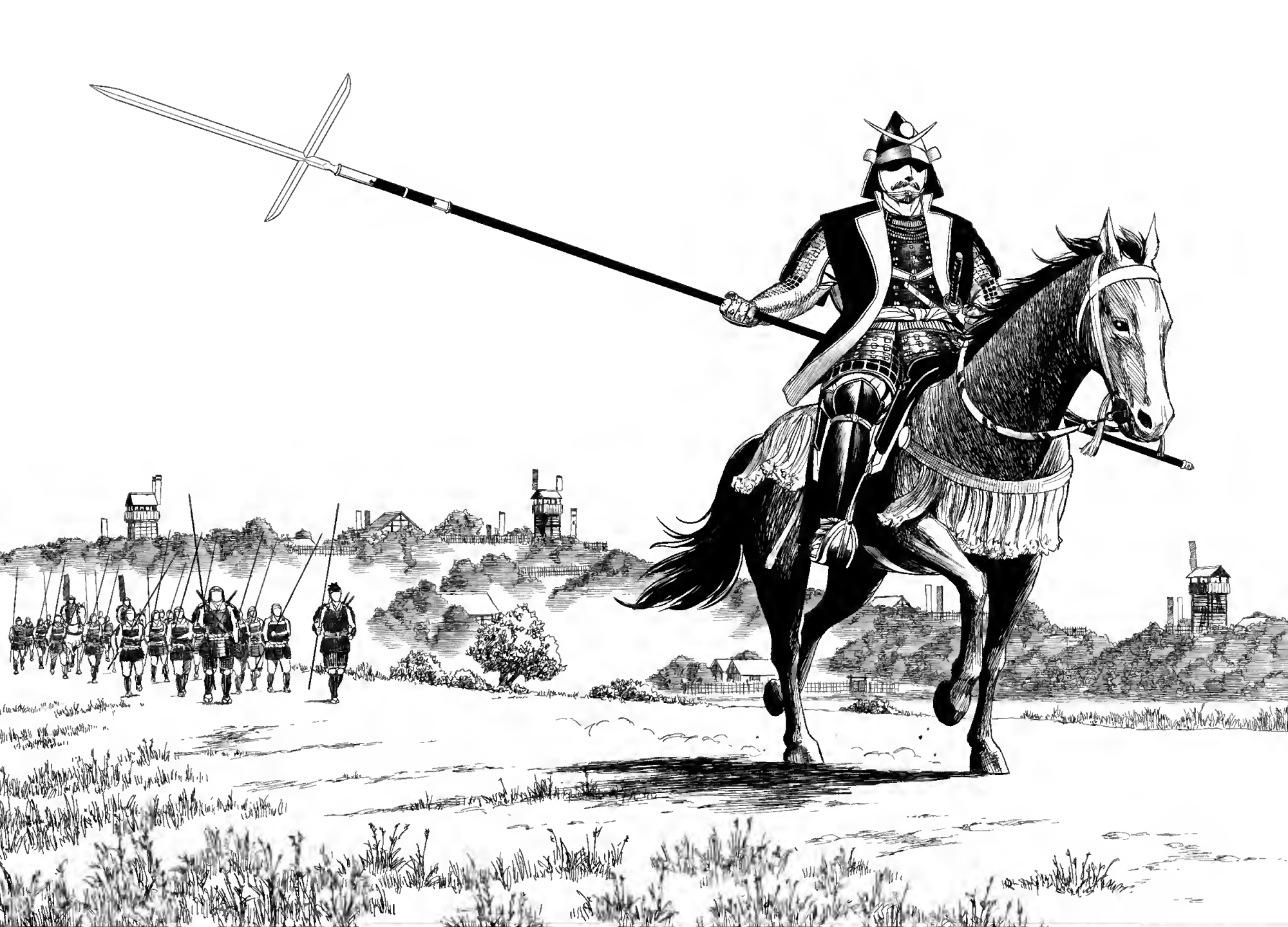
...
I guess I can't tell you to leave the castle now.
T-Two of my relatives were killed too!
HM? You're here too, Yokichi?
You bet!
If that's not possible, then find a good hiding spot and run for it when you see the chance... Just don't die!
Listen up. When the enemies charge inside the castle, do your best to stay away from where the battle is thickest and surrender when the offer is given!
I see...

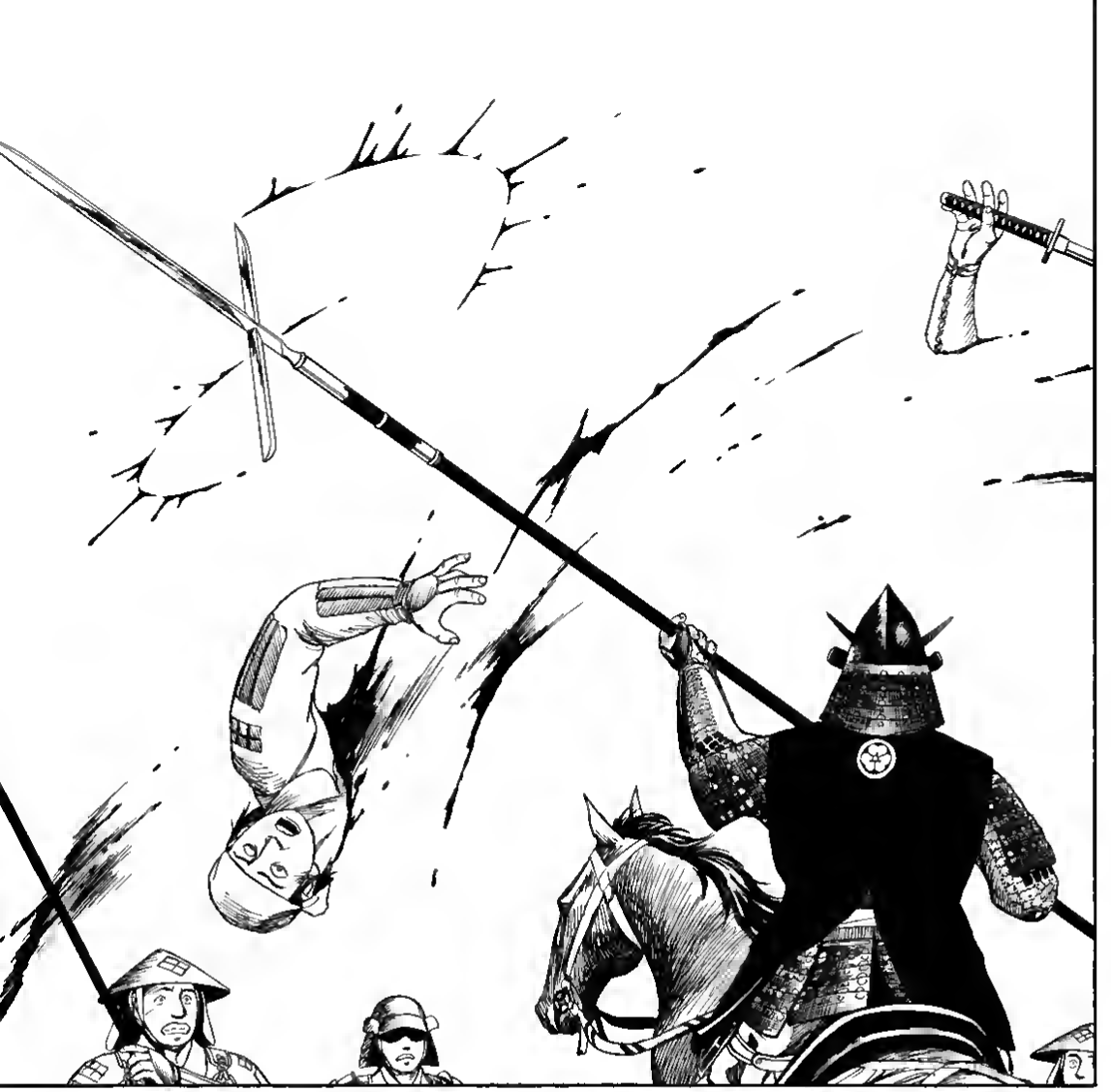
Yokichi?
Aren't you the world's best sw—
...Umm, well even if you aren't, you're still pretty strong, right?
W-Wait!
Hmm?
W-What are you talking about!? Shut up, you idiot!
Why can't you at least return Haruna's feelings!?
If you're that strong...
Your pay, just as I promised.
Here!
D-Don't mind him or me!
You've... already given me something precious.

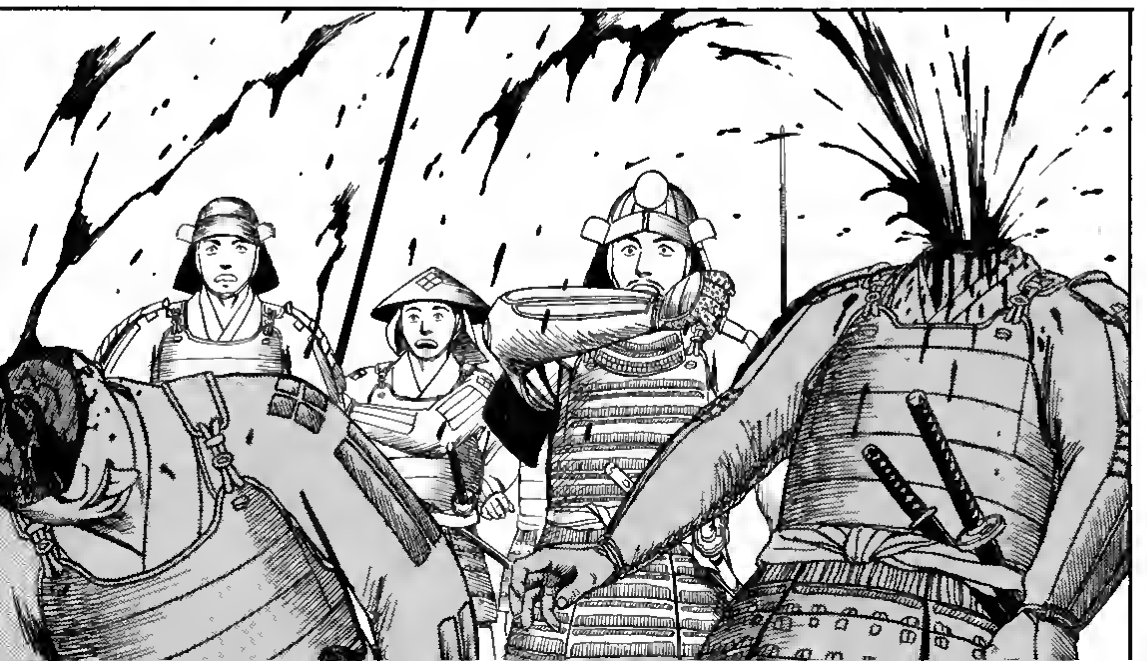
And the other half after battle.
I'll take half now,
...


Sure...!

ギギギ
Feel free to walk out slowly.
Follow my lead.
Well, it's time to make use of whatever skills we do have.
And there's some soldiers coming out behind him...
No, he's holding a great spear,
Who's that...? A messenger?

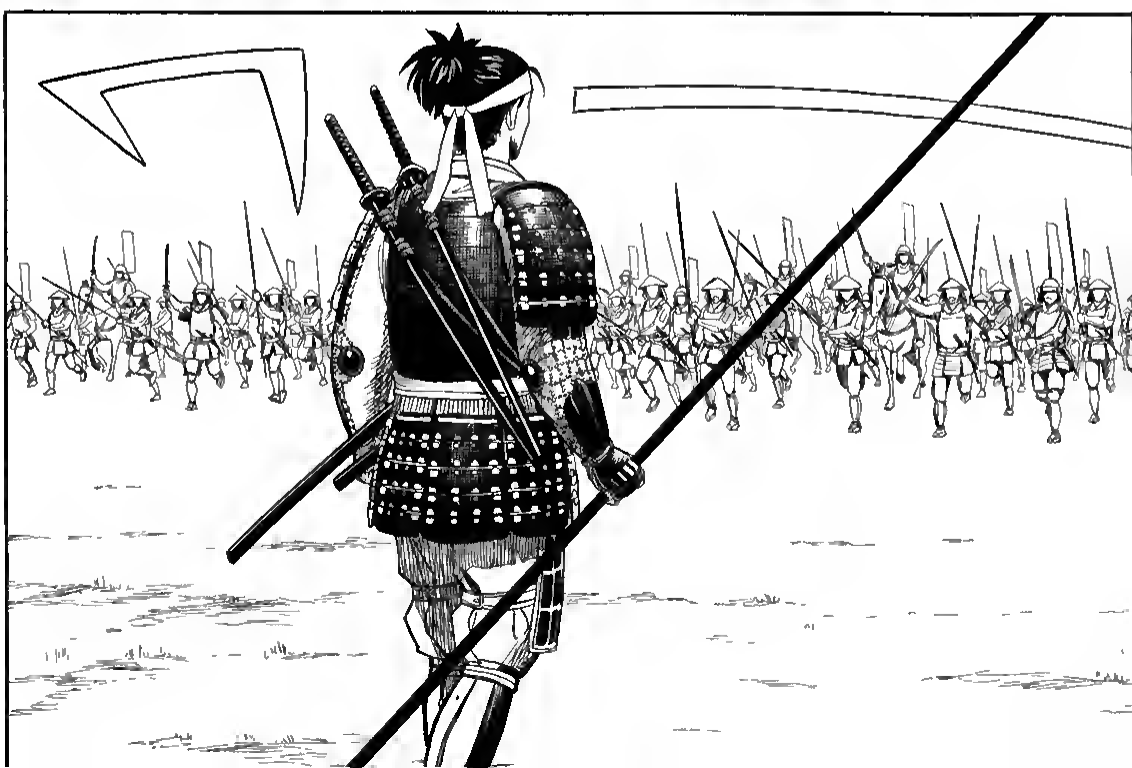




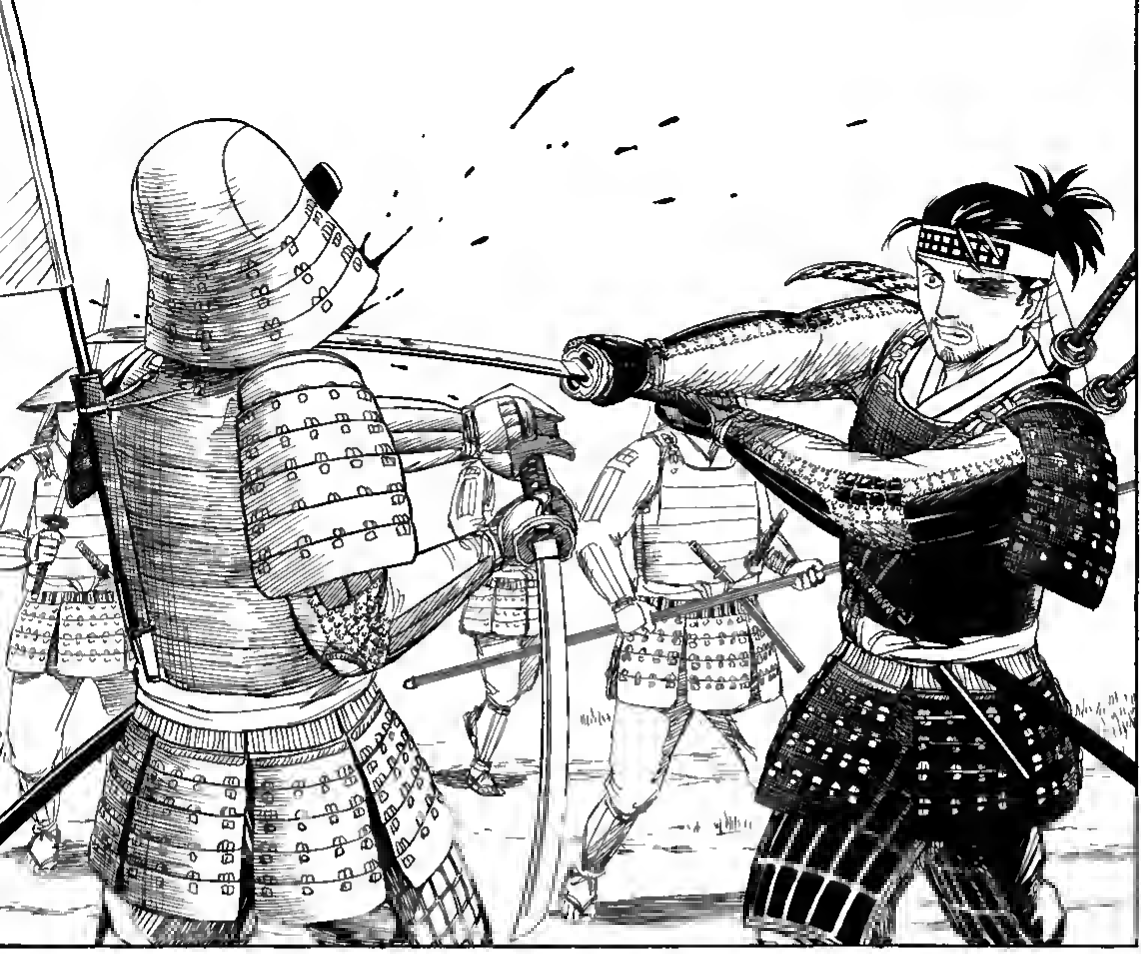


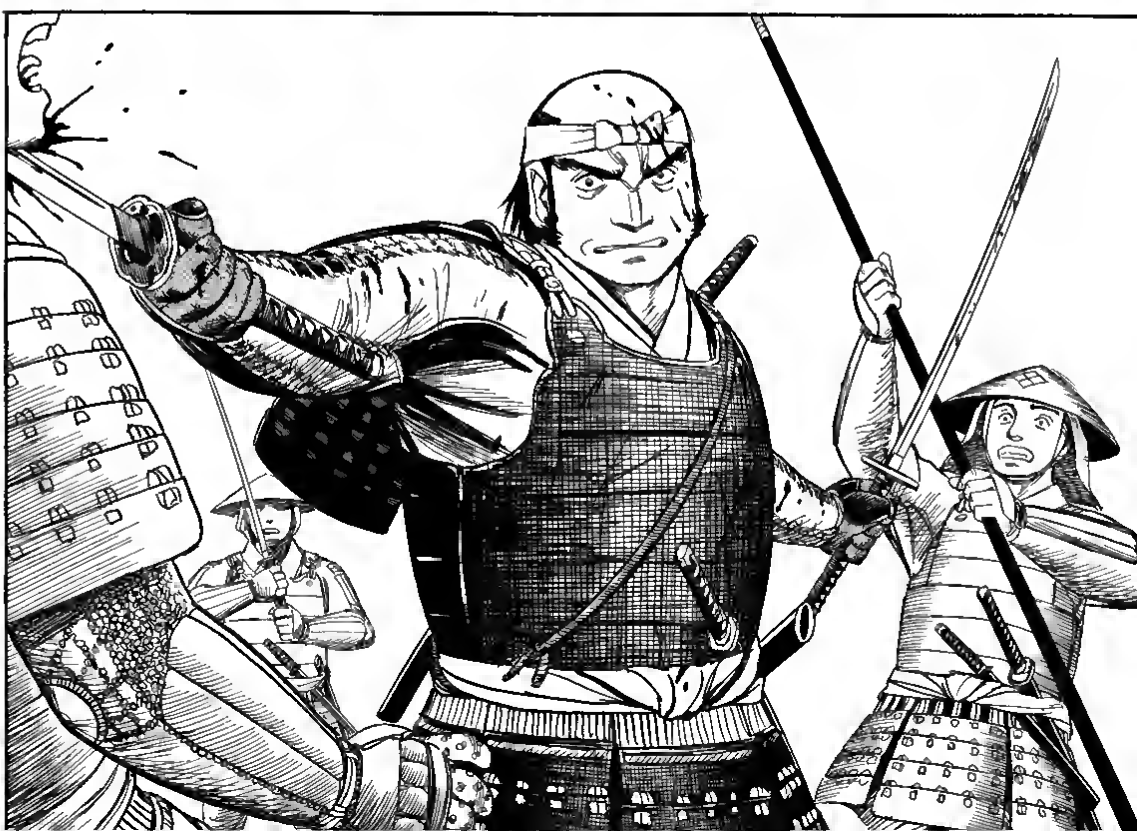
He's stirring up their limbs, alright.
Whoa...

Ha, the same to you!
Don't want to mistake you for an enemy and accidentally cut you down in the chaos of battle.
Jingo, keep some distance away from me.



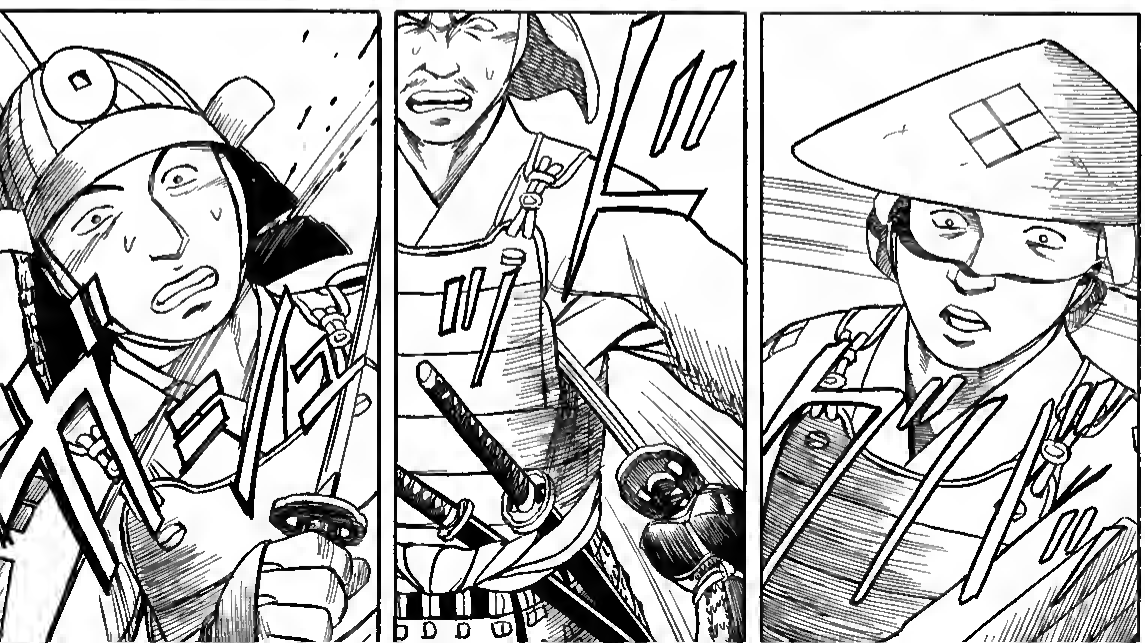
Chapter 4: Blood Spurt



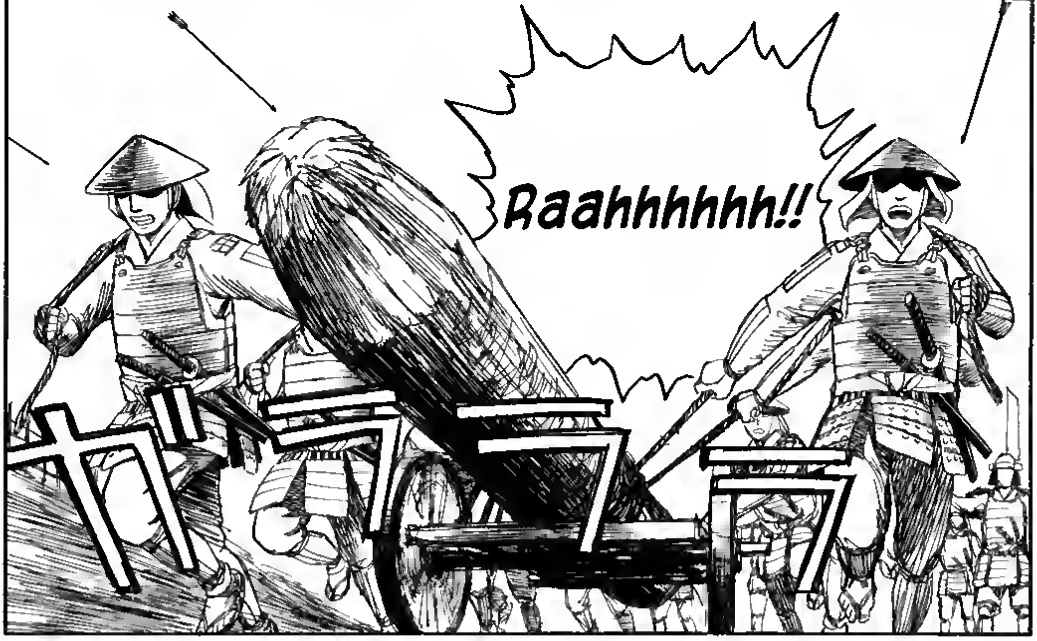


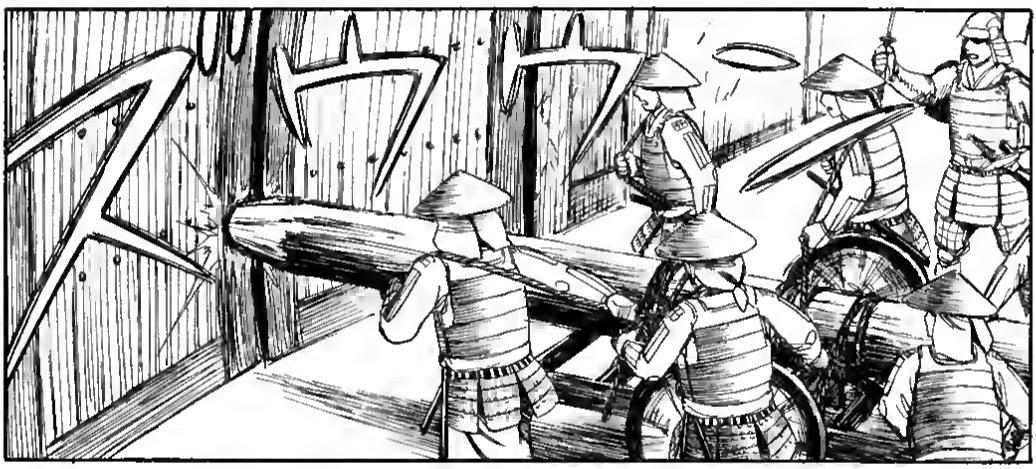
Rahhhhhh!!

Ohhhh!!

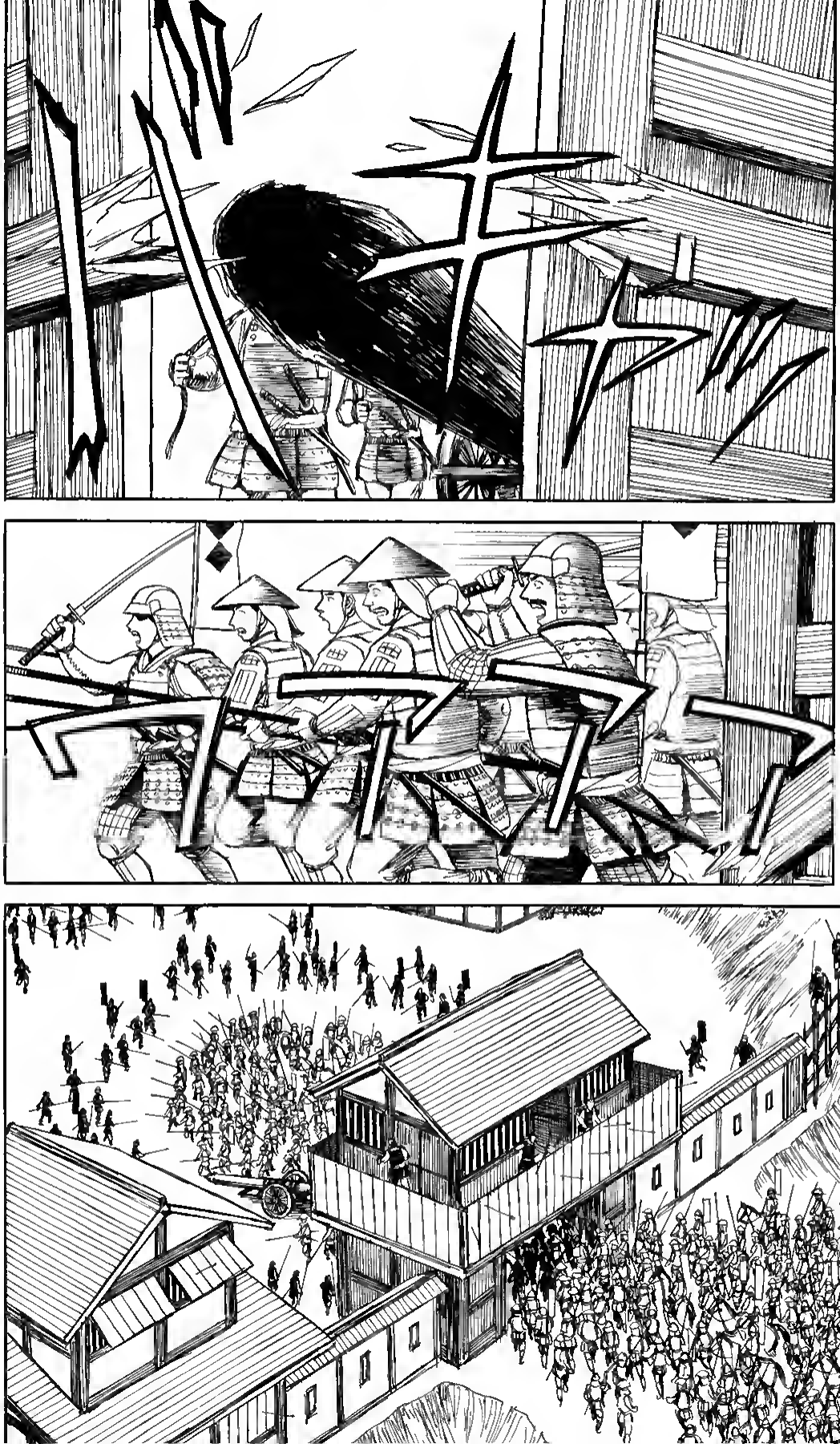


HUFF...
huff...
huff...

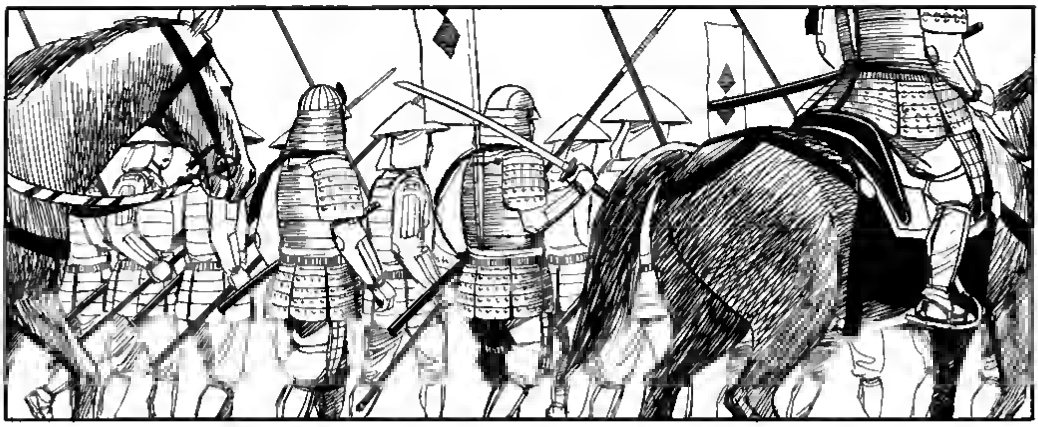

Raahhhhhh!!

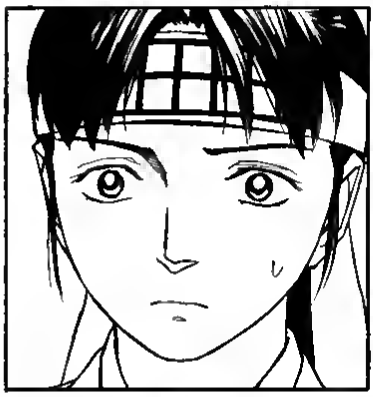


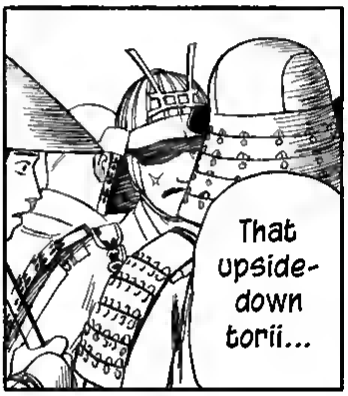
We should go hide somewhere like your master said!
This isn't good, the gates aren't gonna hold!



It has to be! It's the newcomers who're put on the vanguard to storm the gates first!
These are Obata Kazusa-no-Suke's forces.
What!?
Which means they could be here...
Let's hurry up and hide.



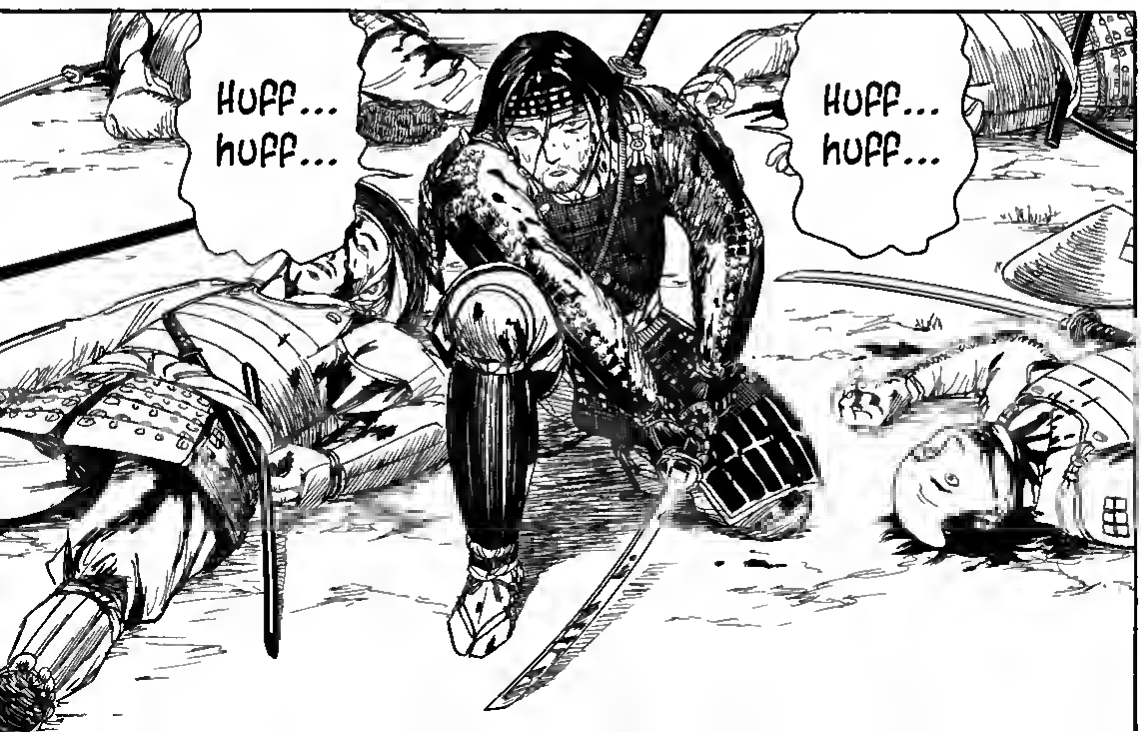


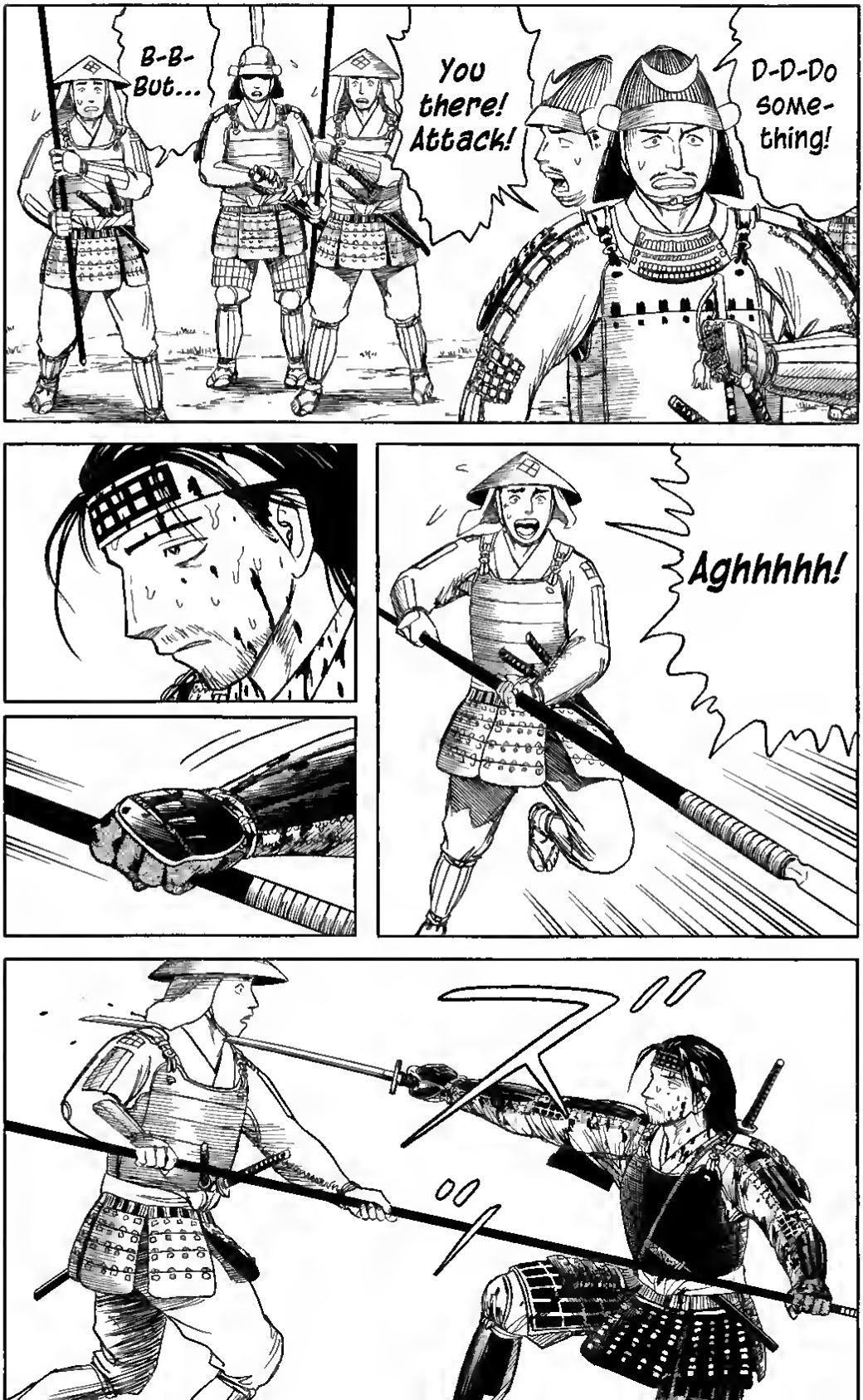

That upside-down torii...

H-Hey, don't go!

Ack!
ガッ

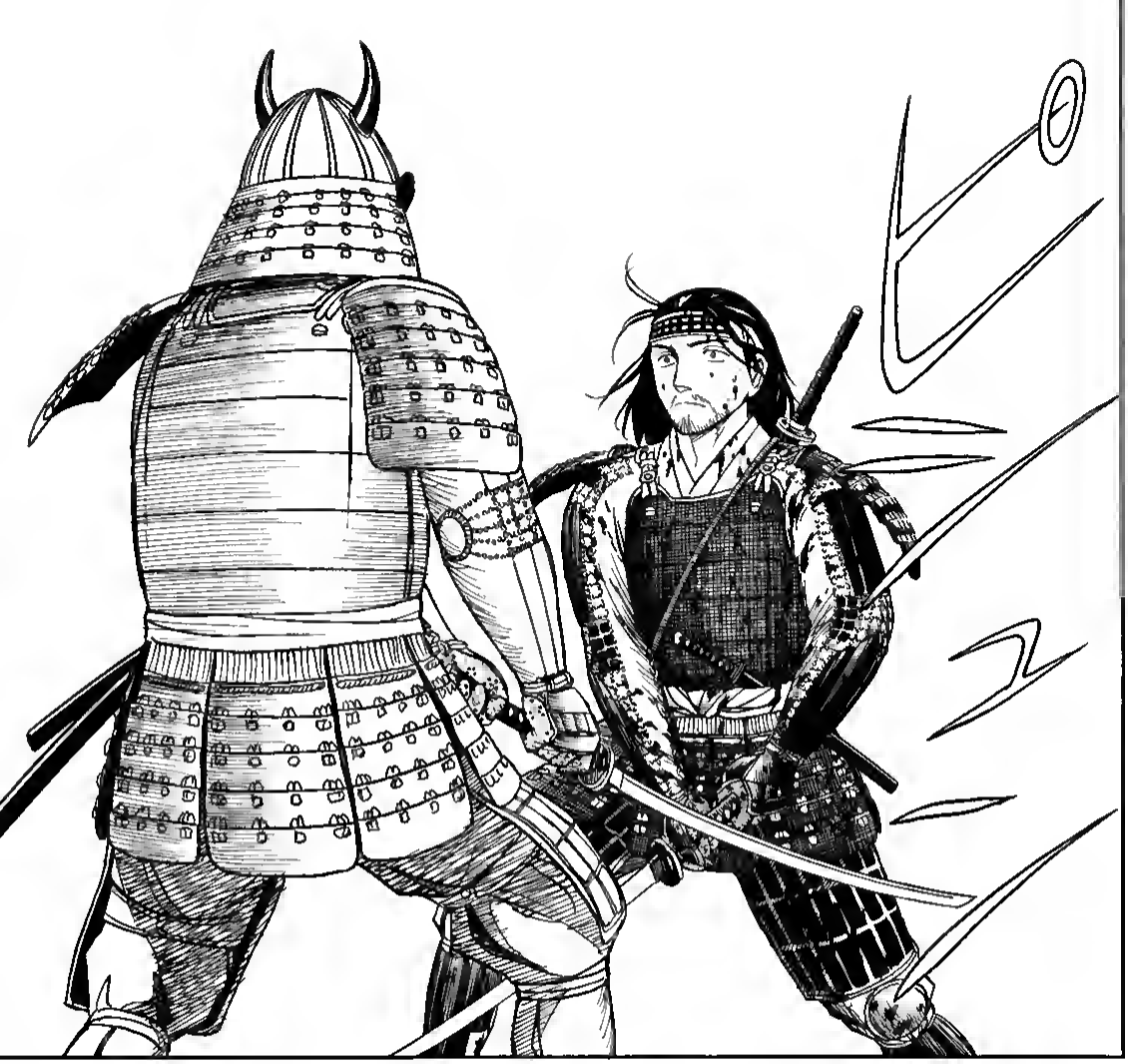
It's him!

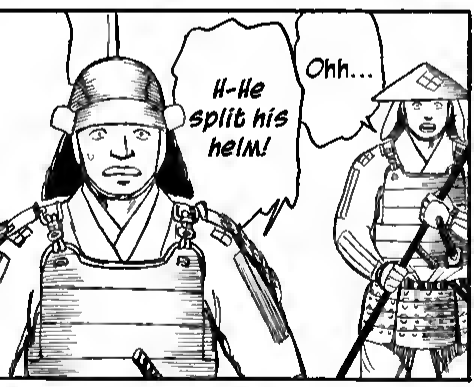

HUFF... huff...
HUFF... huff...

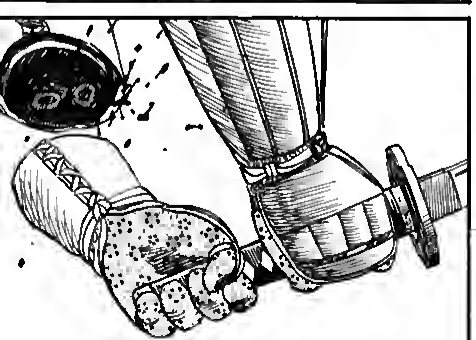

B-B-But...
You there! Attack!
D-D-Do some-thing!
Aghhhhh!

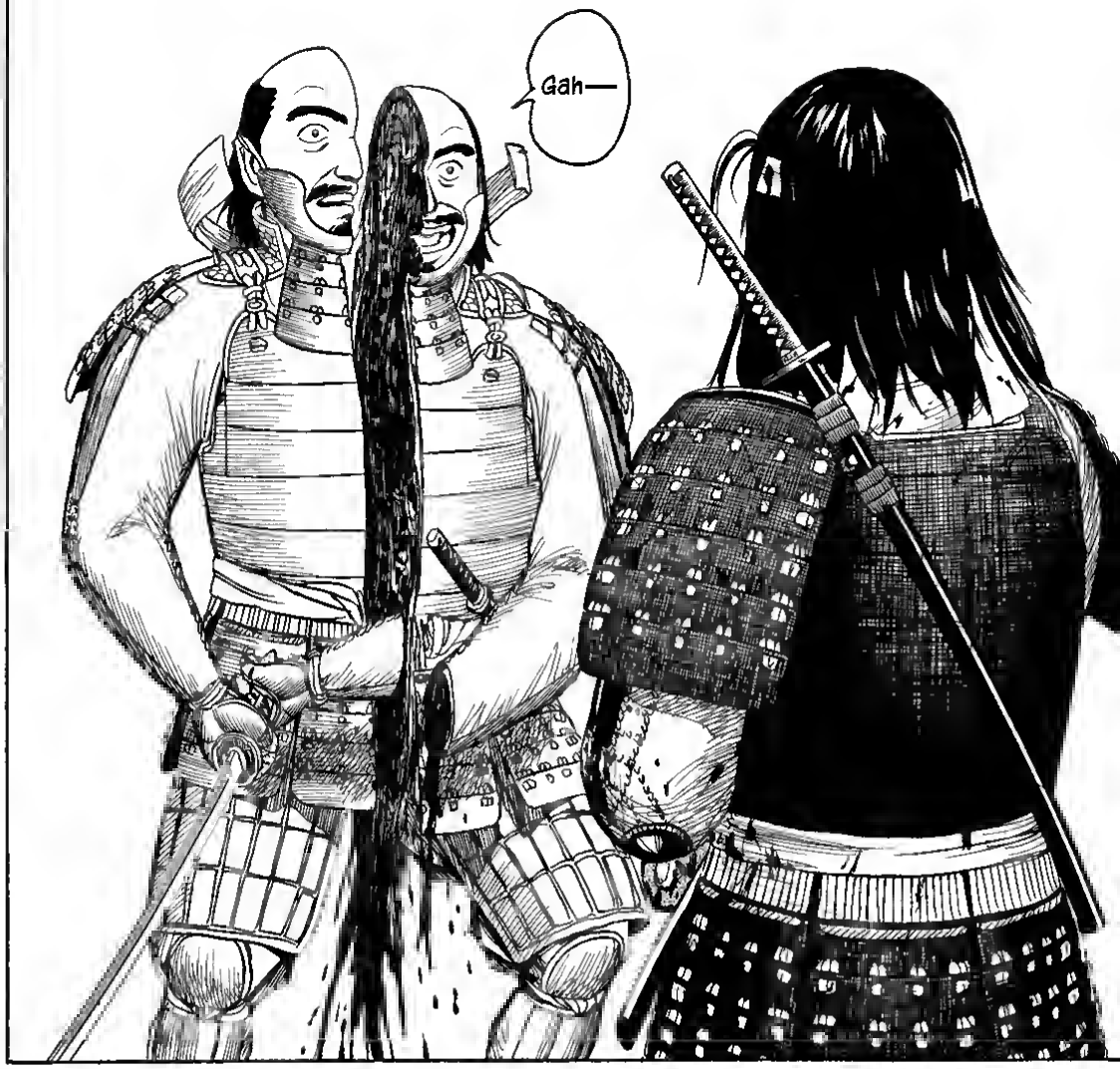
I am Oba Yasoemon!
Retainer to Naitou Shuri,
...
Keep your hands off him! He is mine and mine alone!
Huff... huff...
Huff... huff...
Name yourself.
You may look unimposing... but your skill cannot be denied.
Your head will make for an excellent trophy!
Well done fighting until now!
Bungo...
Hi... Hikita...

Ohhhh!
Hahhh!
...
Raahhh!!

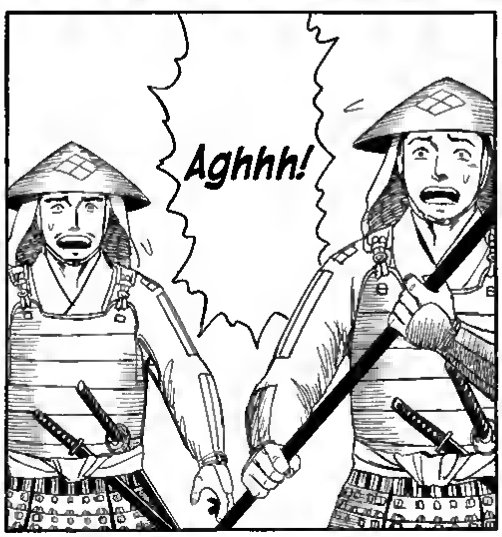



H-He split his helm!
Ohh...




Gah—

D-D-Don't run, you cowards!


Aghhh!

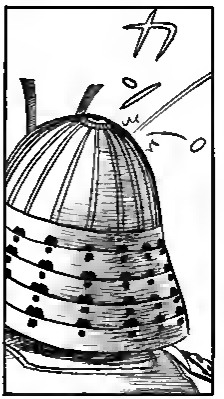
I am Obata Kazusa-no-Suke!
Clansmen of Nagano!

Lay down your arms and strip off your armour!

Shedding further blood is meaning-less!
This battle is hopelessly against your favour!

This coin is...!

?



Seems to have been thrown from there...
...
What is it, Jūrōza?
CLANSMEN OF NAGANO!
T-This is...!
Look.
Gah—

HM?

HMM?

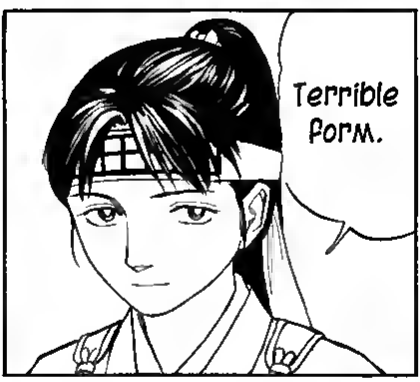
What, a girl?

I will not forgive you men...

Ahh! It's you! My, you've changed!

Give us back our gold!

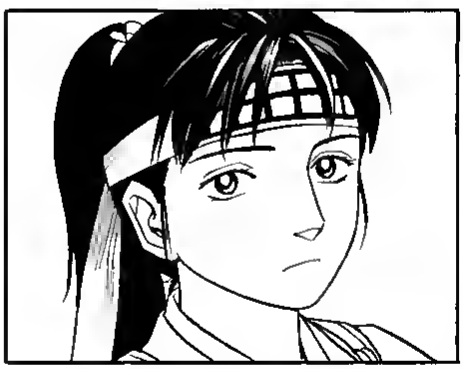
S—


Terrible form.

What did you...

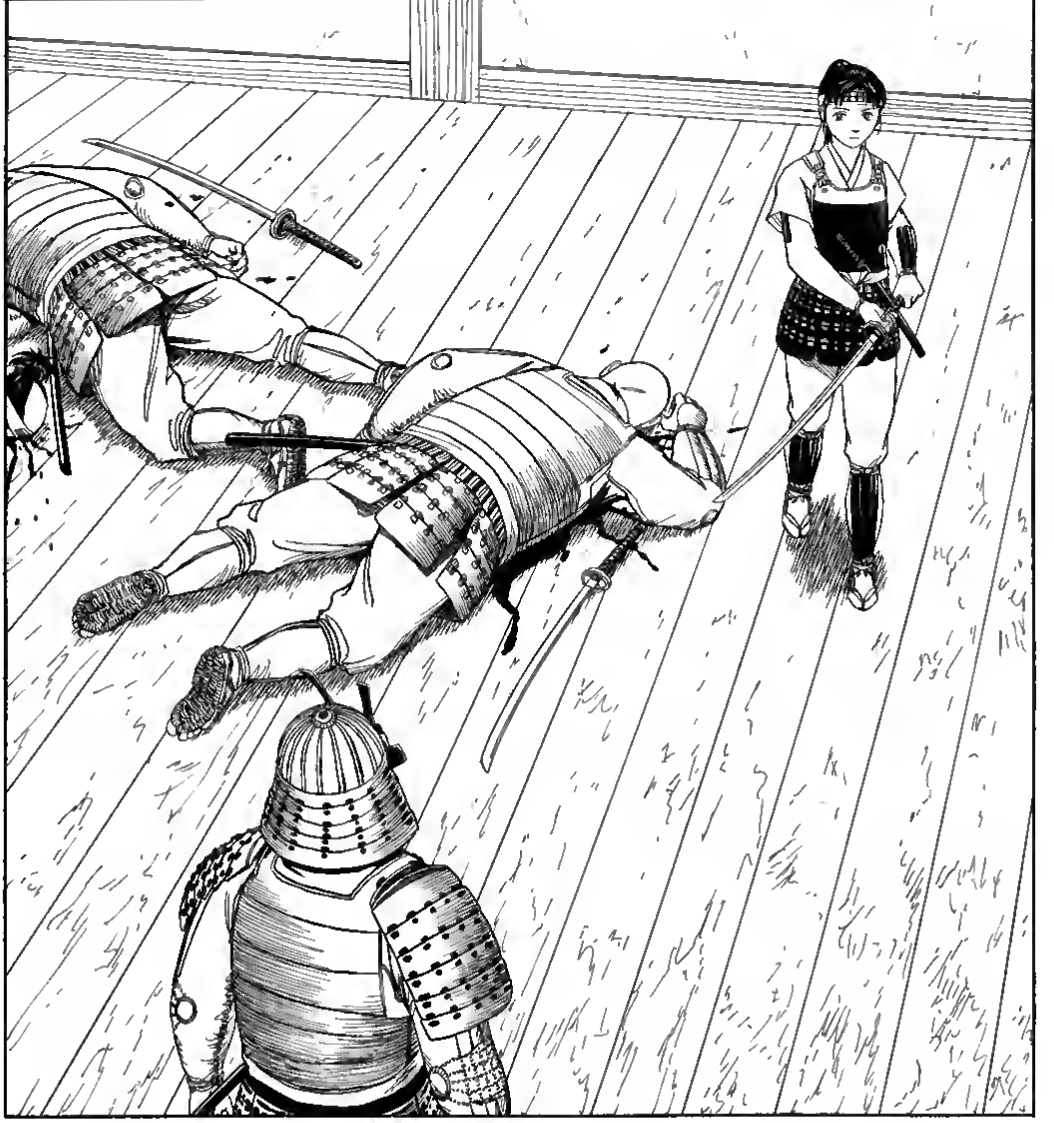
Why you—
Ah!
You're terrible too!
Ugh...
ガン

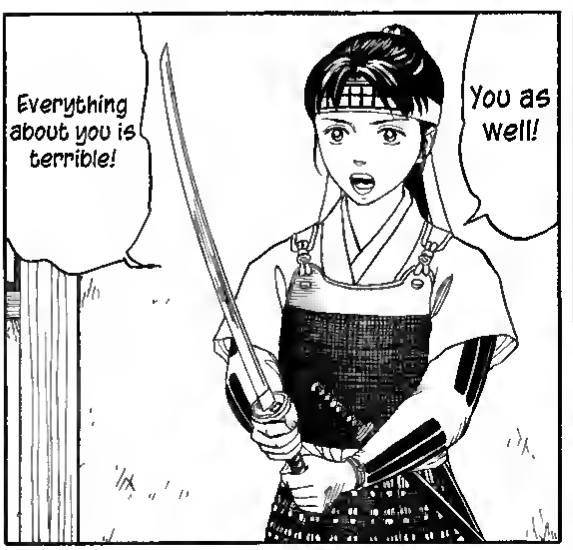
Gahh...



ドサッ

Chapter 5: Game

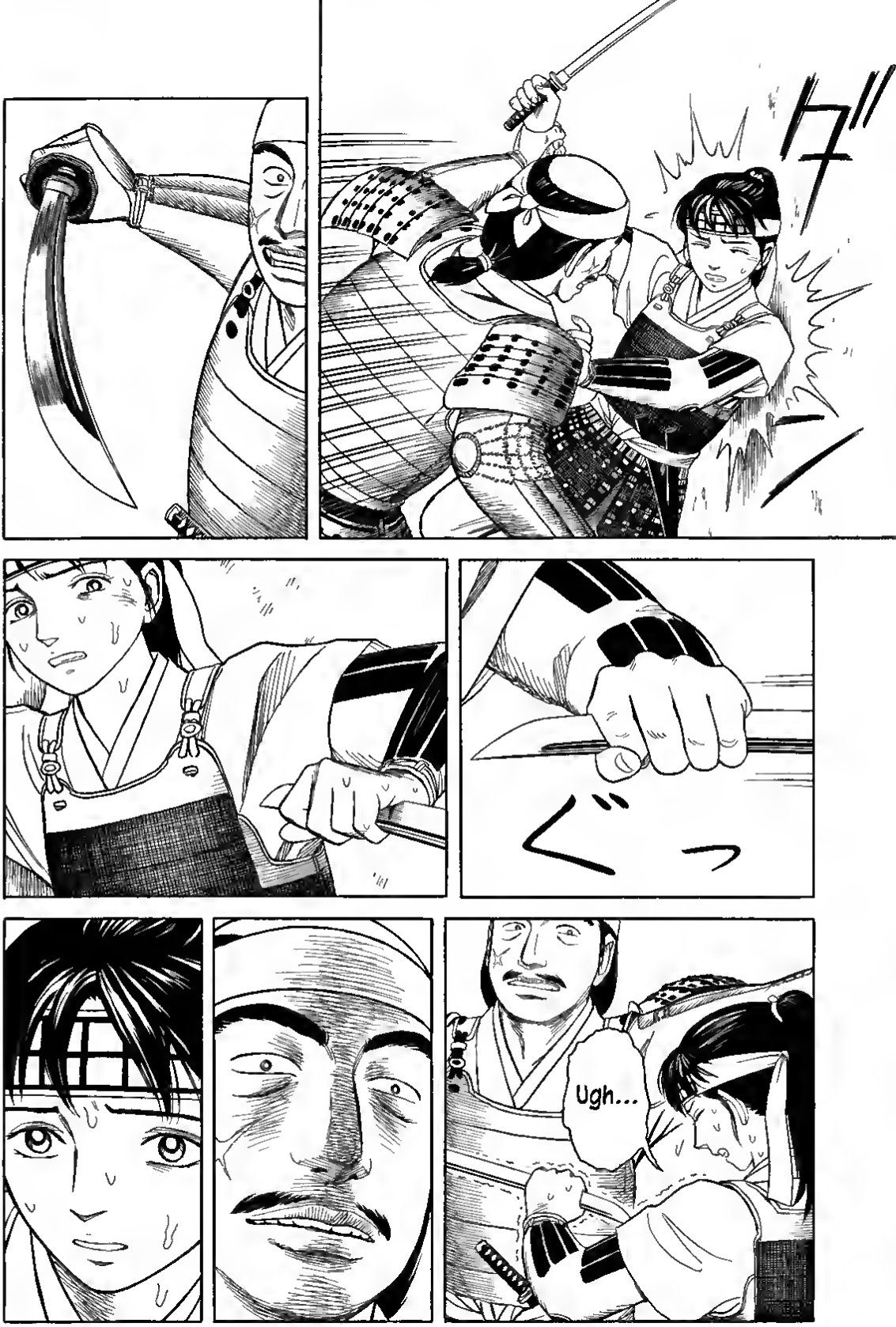



Everything about you is terrible!
You as well!

Oh shit...

...
Was that night so terrible?
Come now...
Haha!
H-Ha...
!
But it wasn't terrrriiible, right...?
Sure, I might've been a lil' rough,
Yes... Now you remember... Wasn't terrible at all, was it? Why else would you have waited here for me?
You wish to be held in my embrace again, don't you?
Try to remember...

Ah—
Gaahhh!!


ぐっ
Ugh...

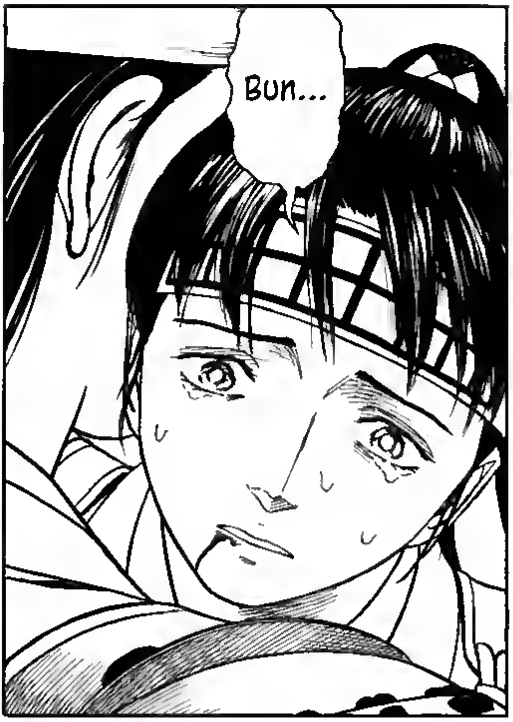
Aghhh!
ガキーン

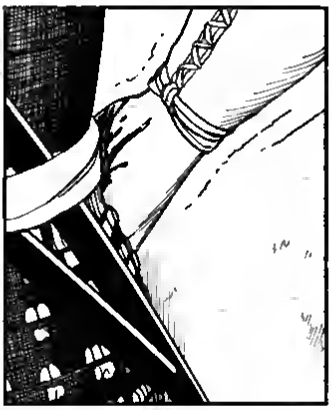
Huff...
huff...
Hee
hee
hee...

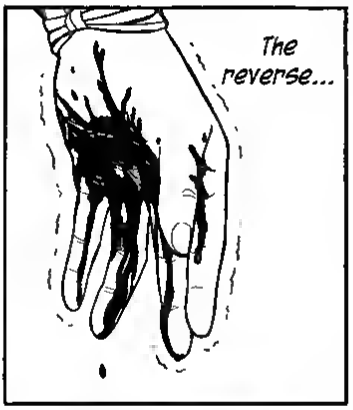
Aghh, such a waste...

And far too much energy exerted on a single stroke.
Far too many superfluous movements...

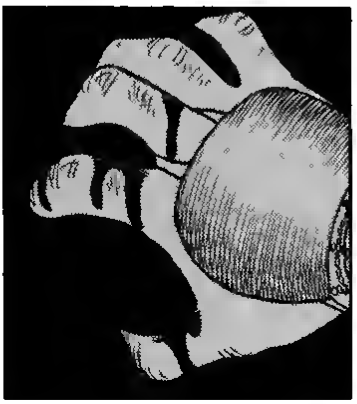
It's the reverse.

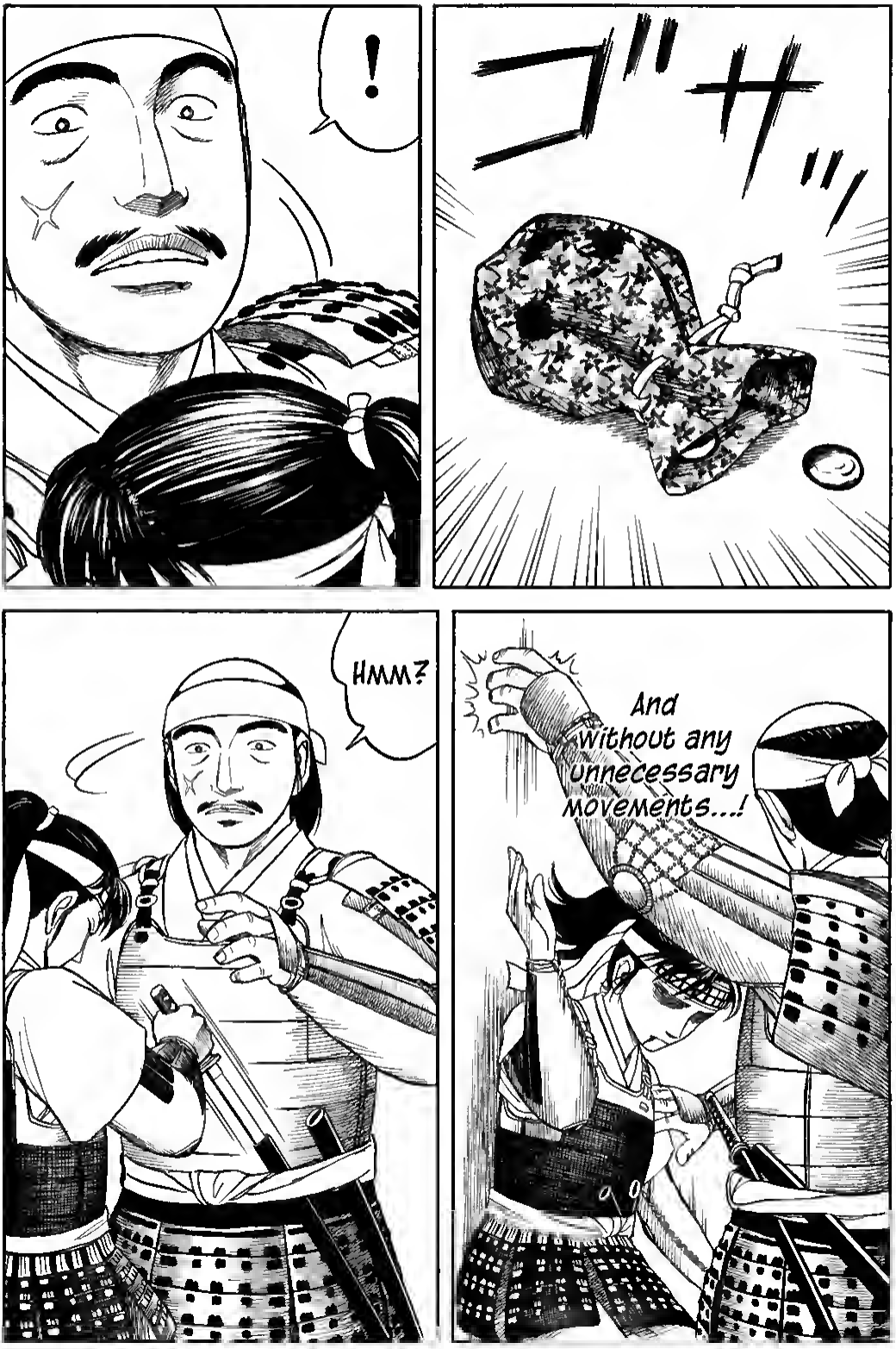

Bun...



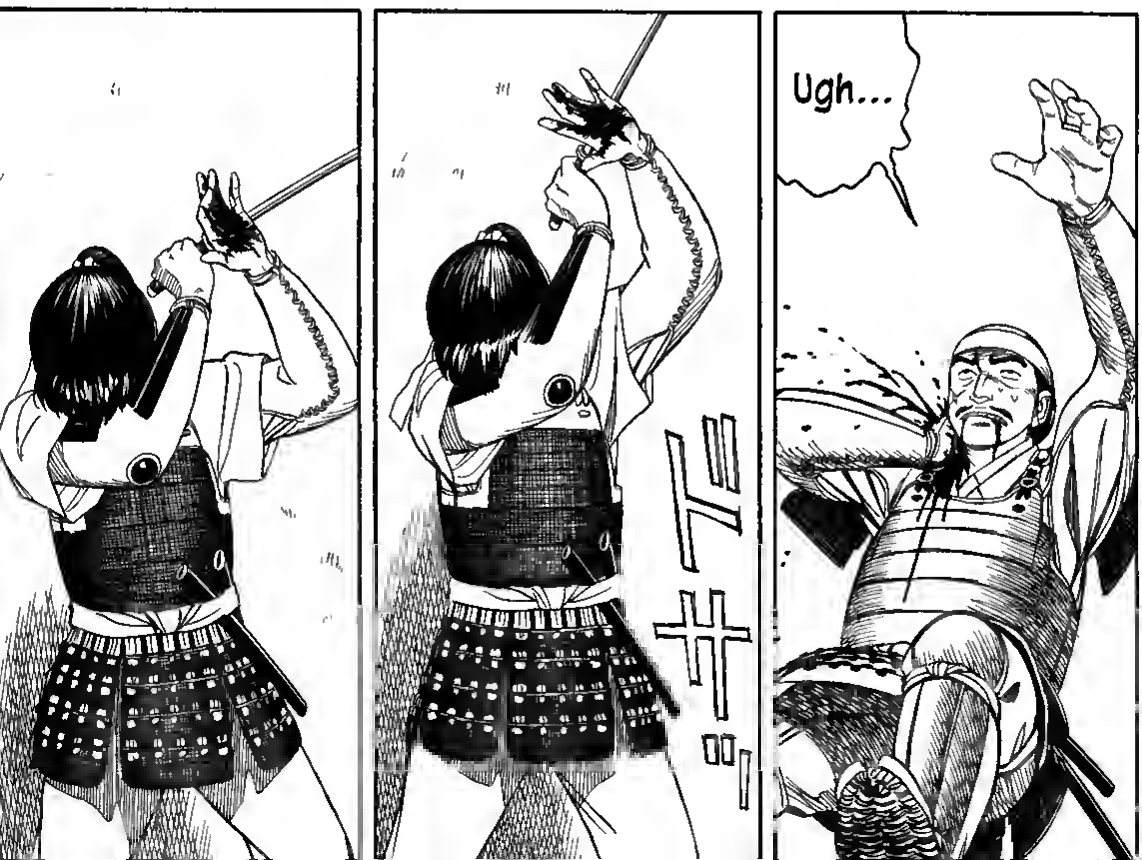

The reverse...

Don't let your thoughts be tangled within one stroke... Examine your opponent's entire body...

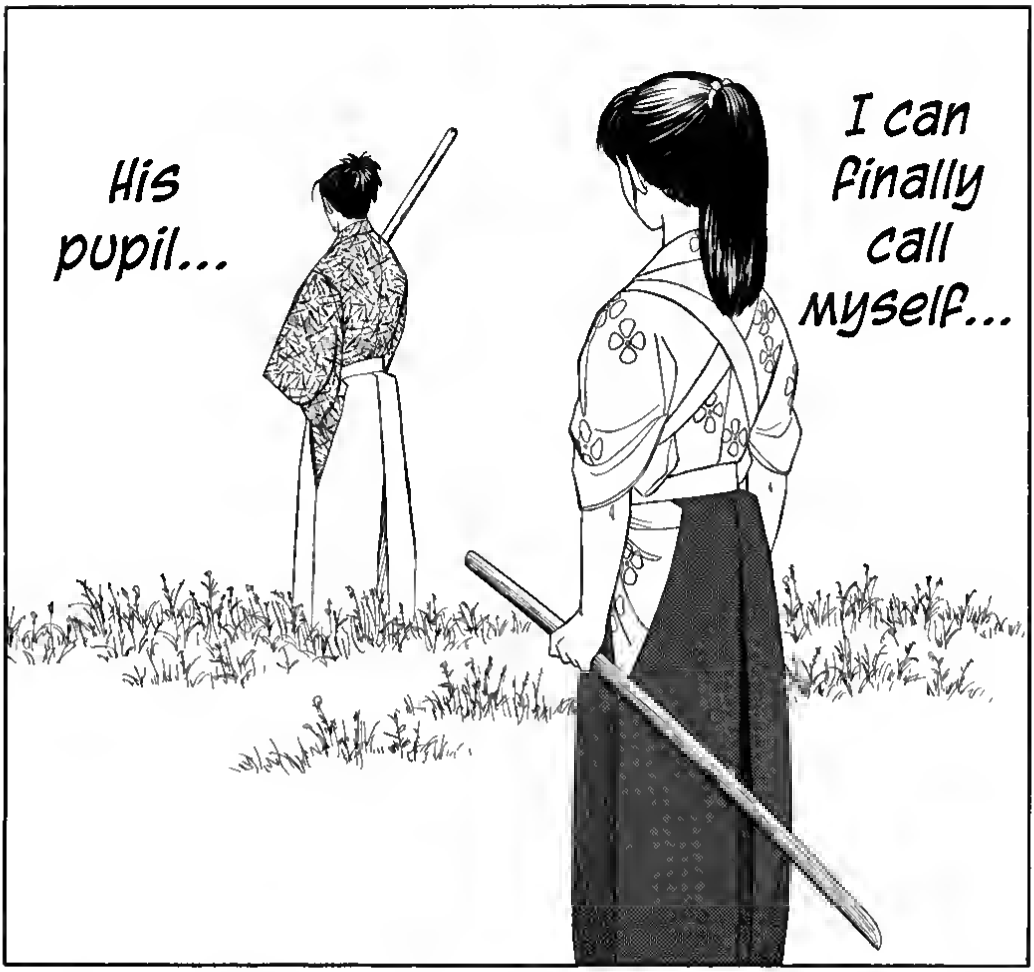


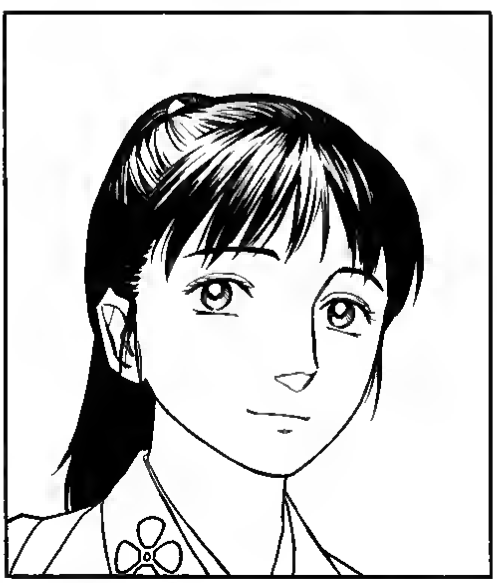

!
ゴサッ
HMM?
And without any unnecessary movements...!

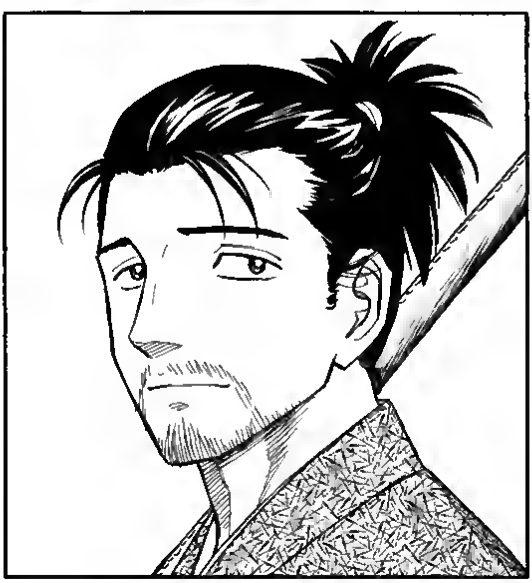
Gahhh!


Ugh...

Haruna!!
Haruna?
Ahh!
Yokichi... It's my last wish... Tell Master Bungorō...
H-Hang in there!
I... I did it...
With this...
Haru-na...
Everything worked out well... thanks to him...

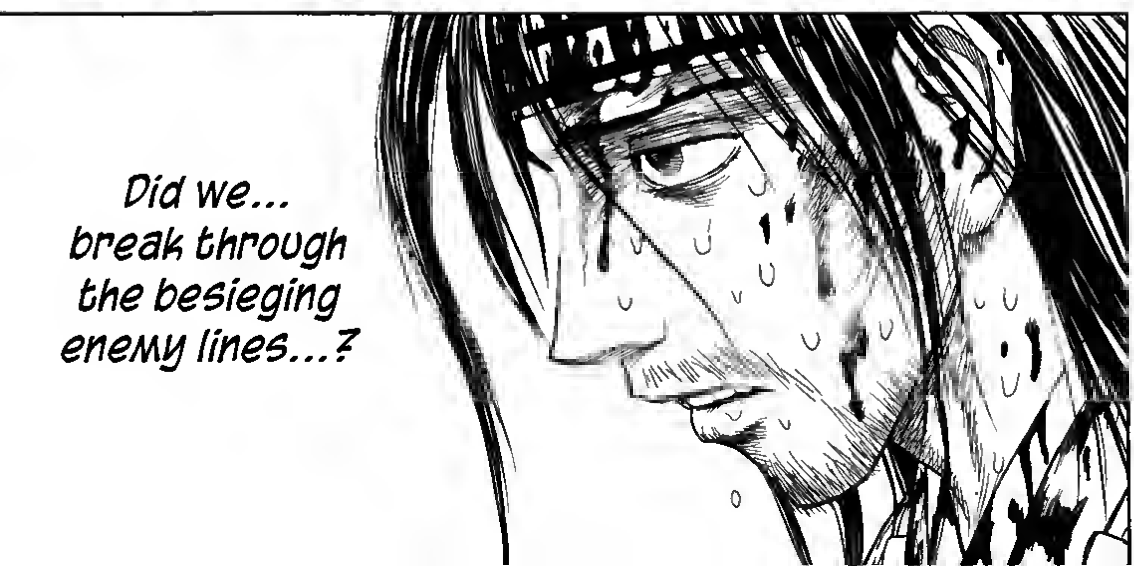

His pupil...
I can finally call myself...





Ha...
Haru...
Nooo!
Nooo...

HUFF.. HUFF...
HUFF.. HUFF...


Did we... break through the besieging enemy lines...?

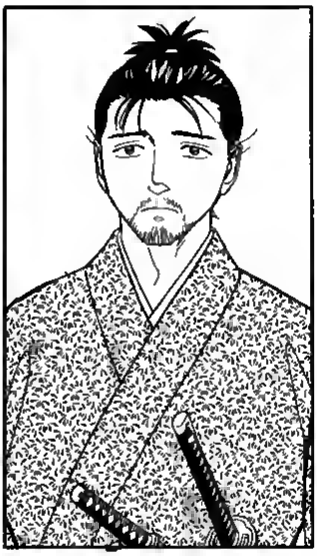
Jingo...
Master...
Haruna...

I hear you refused Takeda's offer to become his vassal. What a waste.
...
You really must be one hell of a swordsman, for him to let an enemy go.
I'm leaving on a journey...
I'll probably never return here.
Oh, I see.
Fine, take your look at Mt. Haruna for all I care.

That's right... I'm nothing special...
Couldn't even protect one castle and one girl!
But don't you forget! Even two of the world's so-called best swordsmen,
No... You keep that...
Here! It's the remaining half!
Hmph! I can't believe Haruna wanted me to tell you that everything worked out well thanks to you!
Take care...
...
Fine, have it your way!
Oh.

Guh!

All I did was play around with you for a short while...!
You fool...

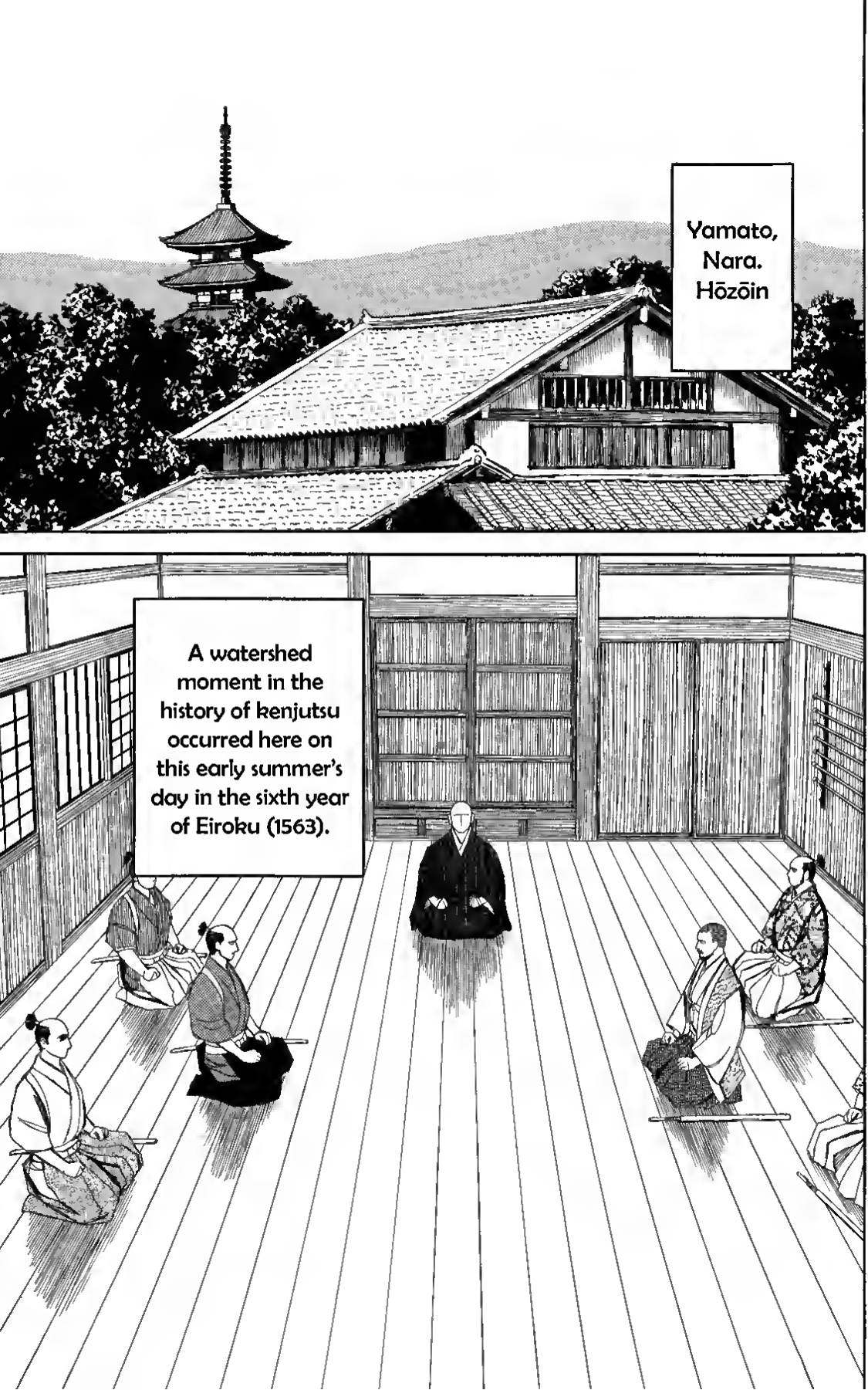


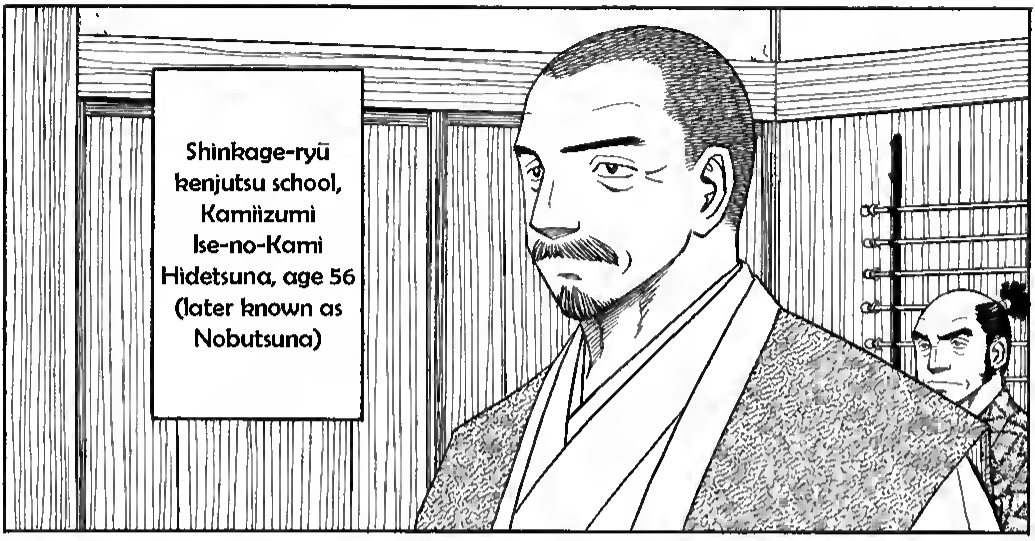
Right...

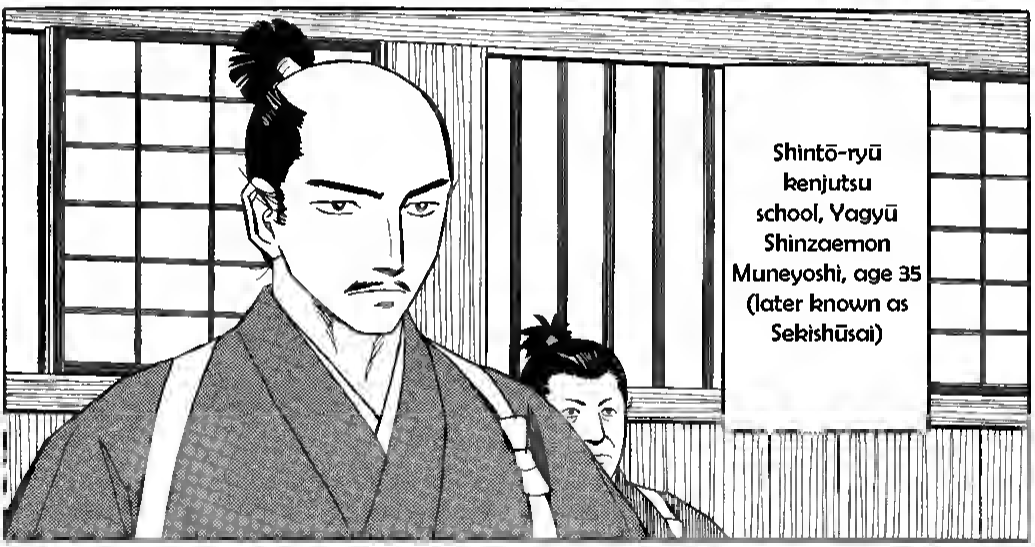
Stop walking so slowly!
Bungorō!

Let us walk at a leisurely pace then...
Ah well,

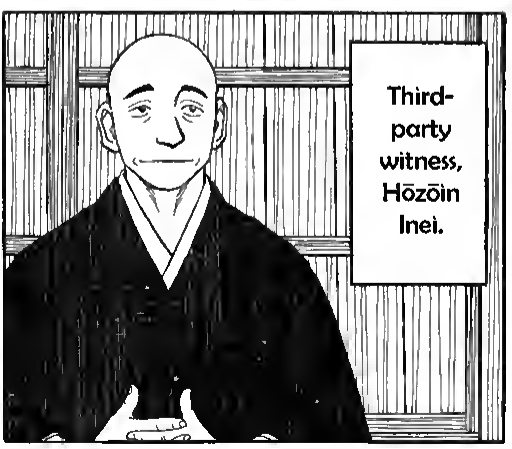
He's been like that ever since leaving Jōshū.


Yamato,
Nara.
Hōzōin
A watershed moment in the history of kenjutsu occurred here on this early summer's day in the sixth year of Eiroku (1563).

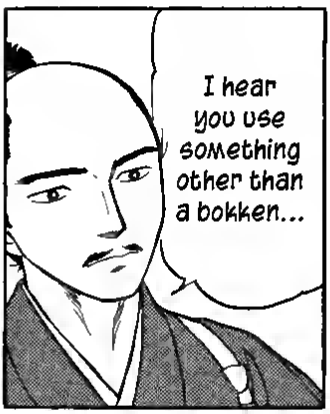

Shinkage-ryū kenjutsu school, Kamiizumi Ise-no-Kami Hidetsuna, age 56 (later known as Nobutsuna)


Shintō-ryū kenjutsu school, Yagyū Shinzaemon Muneyoshi, age 35 (later known as Sekishūsai)

So this is the undisputed master swordsman of central Japan...


Third-party witness, Hōzōin Inei.

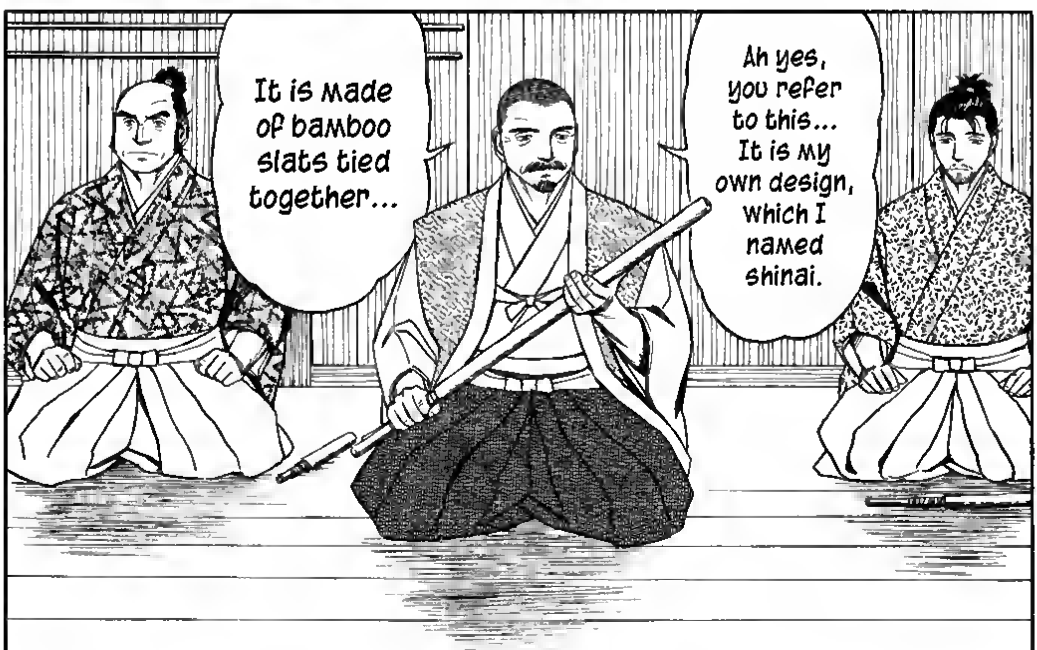
I would be honoured to have a practice match with you.
Your fame as a master swordsman is well known to us in the West.

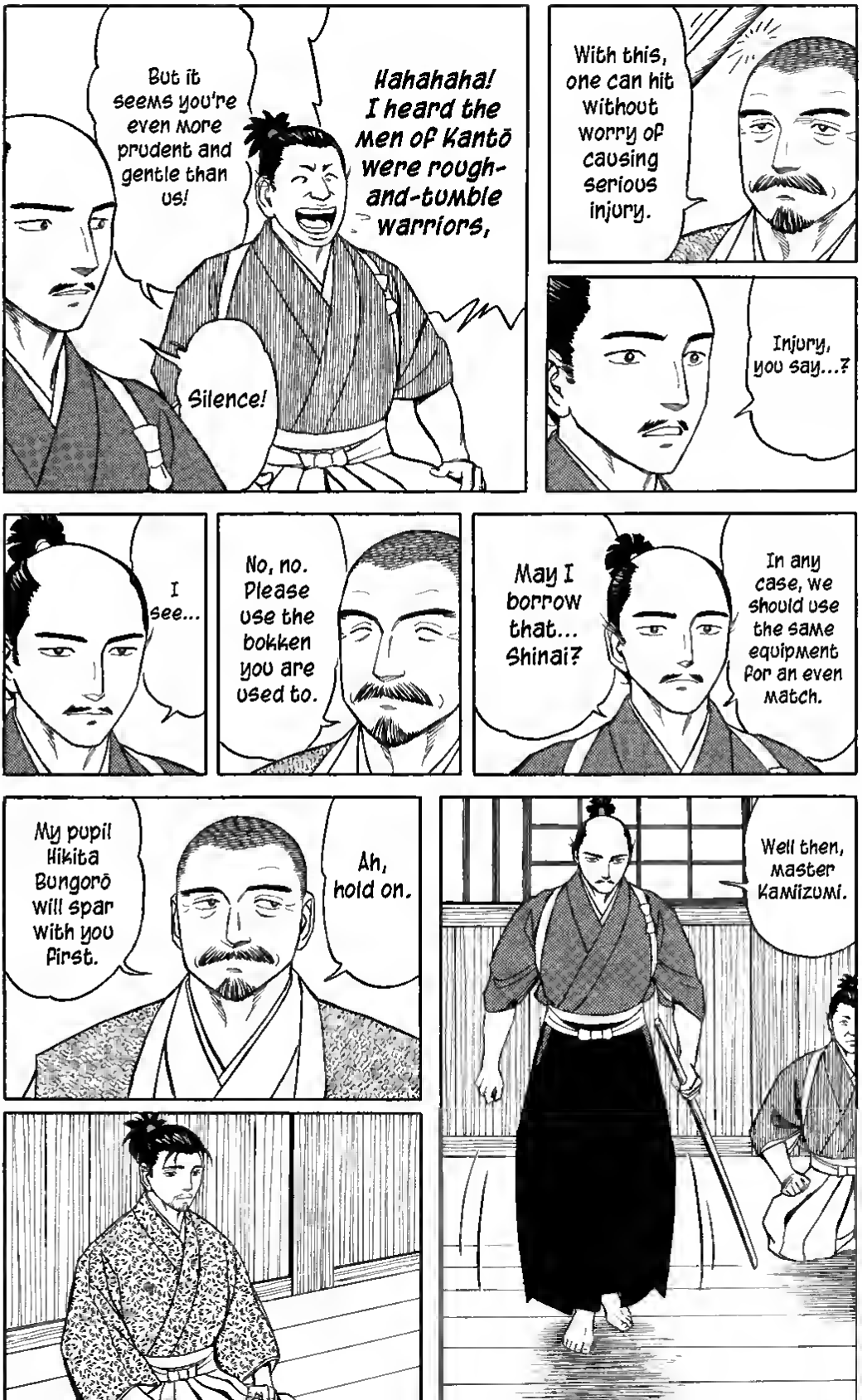

I hear you use something other than a bokken...

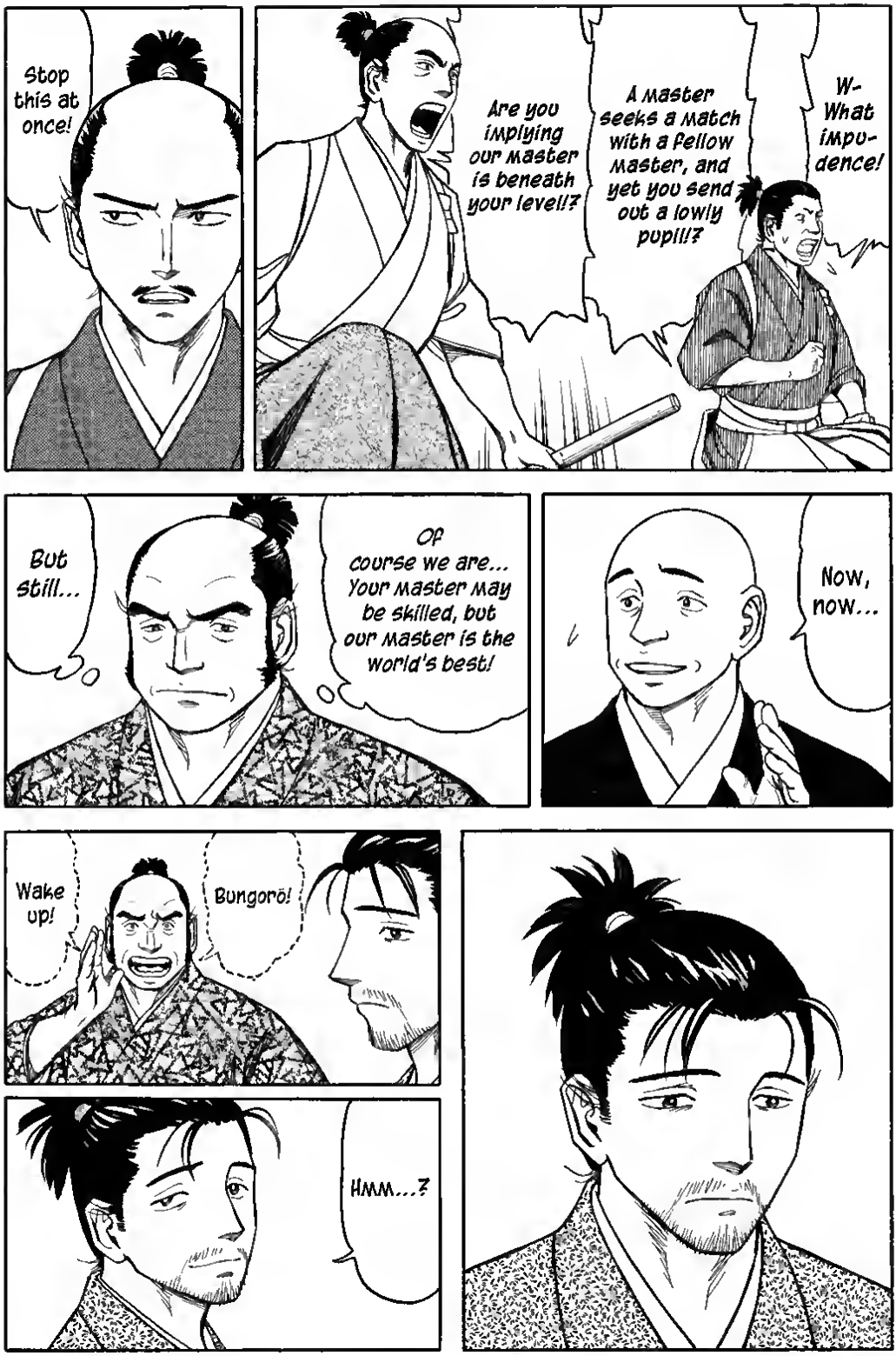
Yes?

There is one question I have, however.

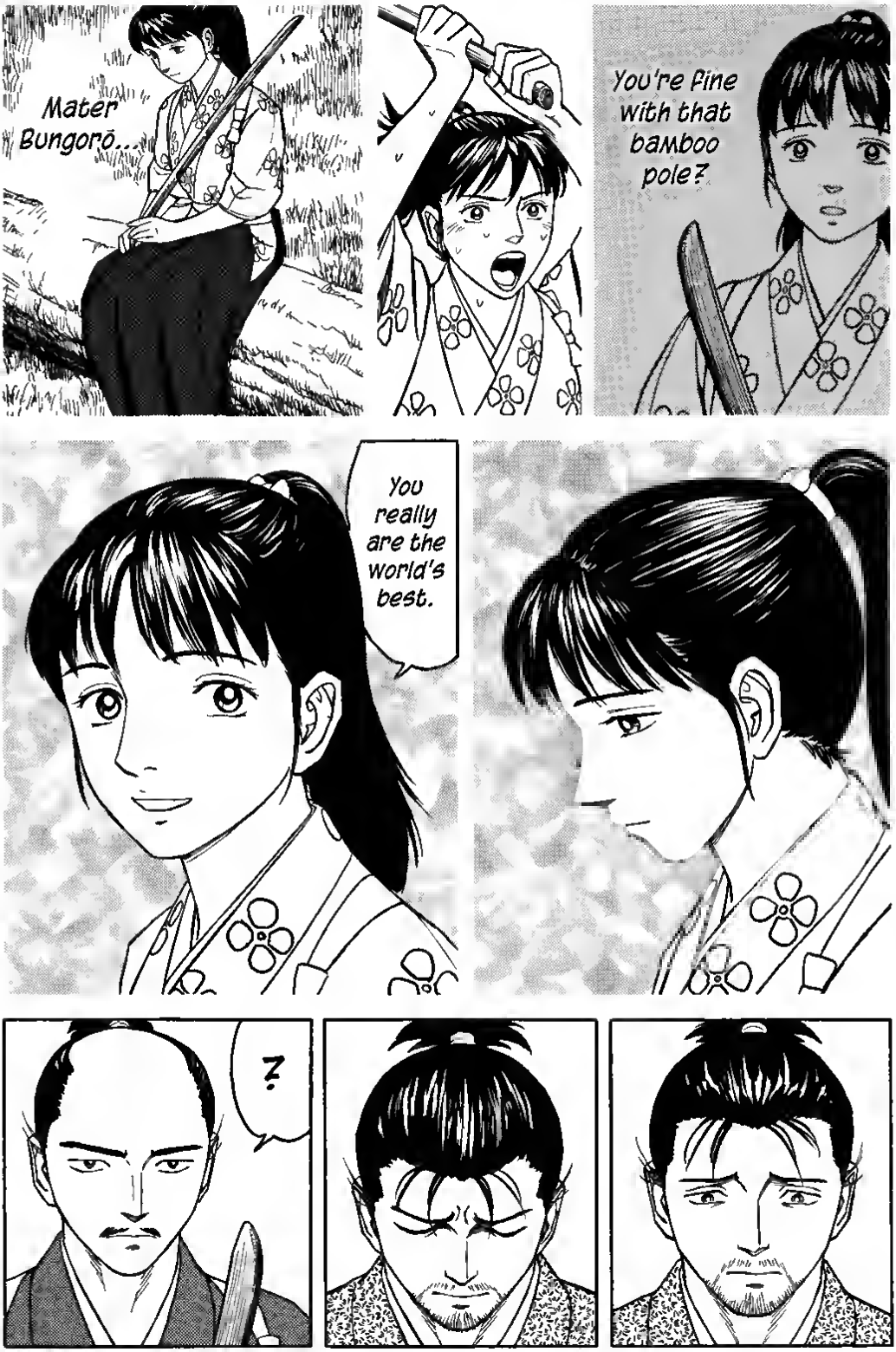
Thank you.


It is made of bamboo slats tied together...
Ah yes, you refer to this... It is my own design, which I named shinai.

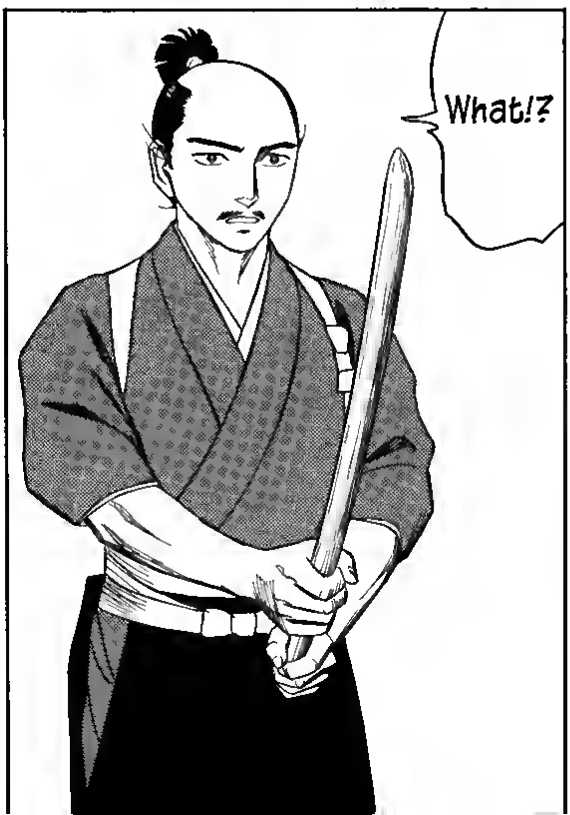

Hahahaha! I heard the men of Kantō were rough-and-tumble warriors,
But it seems you're even more prudent and gentle than us!
Silence!
With this, one can hit without worry of causing serious injury.
Injury, you say...?
I see...
No, no. Please use the bokken you are used to.
May I borrow that... Shinai?
In any case, we should use the same equipment for an even match.
My pupil Hikita Bungorō will spar with you first.
Ah, hold on.
Well then, master Kamiizumi.


Stop this at once!
W-What impudence!
A master seeks a match with a fellow master, and yet you send out a lowly pupil!?
Are you implying our master is beneath your level!?
Now, now...
Of course we are... Your master may be skilled, but our master is the world's best!
But still...
Bungorō!
Wake up!
Hmm...?

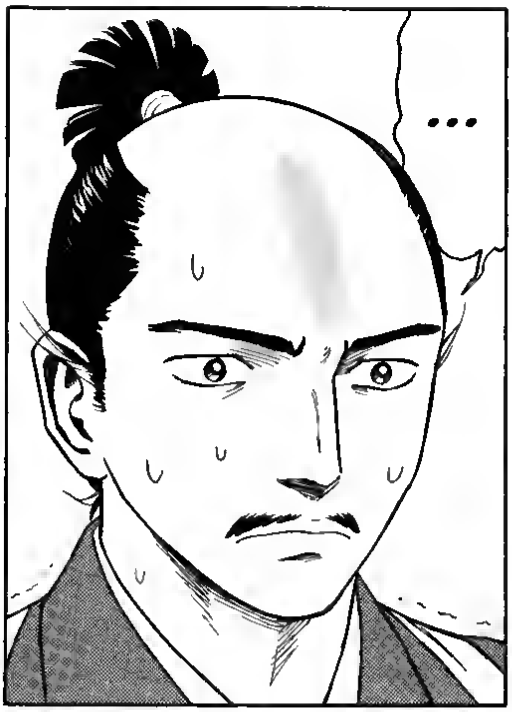
Look at that dim-witted face of his! Dispose of him quickly, master!
Ah— ...oh.
I shall first challenge your pupil, Hikita.
Very well.
Enjoy it. This is a game.
Bungo.
Shinkage-ryū kenjutsu school, Hikita Bungorō Kagetada, age 27
A game...
Ready!
A game ...?


Mater Bungorō...
You're fine with that bamboo pole?
You really are the world's best.
?

Your form,
Is terrible.


What!?

A clean strike.



It is said he always used a shinai and he never lost a match.

Meanwhile, Hikita Bungorō separated with his master and travelled from province to province, seeking matches.

The great Yagyū Shinzaemon failed to take even a single point from Kamiizumi's pupil Hikita Bungorō. After this humbling incident, Yagyū studied Shinkage-ryū and became its second head after Kamiizumi's passing, which is how the renowned Yagyū Shinkage-ryū school came to be.

Sword Dance / End

実在人物小解説

雪の峠

梅津憲忠（半右衛門）　一五七二～一六三〇
佐竹義宣の近習、後に家老。戦場のみならず雄偉を示す逸話がいくつか残り、剛勇の士といった観があるが、渋江政光の後を引き継ぎ家老となってからは藩政に辣腕をふるった。

梅津政景（主馬）　一五八一～一六三三
憲忠の弟。銀山奉行から勘定奉行を経て四十五歳で家老格。兄の死後家老となり久保田の町奉行を兼ねる。彼の残した「梅津政景日記」は藩政初期の国情を知る上での重要史料とされる。

梶原政景（美濃守）　一五四四～一六二三
関東の戦国武将・太田資正の次男で太田資晴と、いう名も持つ。若い頃より文武にすぐれ父母に愛されたが、家督相続を危ぶんだ兄により城を追われ佐竹家に身をよせる。以来長期にわたり同家に仕えるわけだが「客分」としての身分は変わらなかったらしい。しかし逆にそれが、佐竹家出奔および松平家への仕官をさほど大問題としなかったものと考えられる。越前松平家では二千石。八十歳で没した。

川井忠遠（伊勢守）　?～一六〇三
佐竹家譜代の家臣。出羽へ国替の際は和田昭為とともに先発隊として土崎湊城を受け取る。後、渋江政光暗殺を企て梅津政景に討ち取られた。

佐竹義重　一五四七～一六一二
常陸を中心に勢力を張った戦国大名。「鬼義重」とあだ名される程の勇将ぶりであったというが、情勢判断も的確で早期に織田・豊臣勢力と結び、それがために佐竹家と対立関係にあった北条・伊達家には不利に働いた。実は徳川家康とも親しかったらしい。狩猟中に落馬して死んだという。

佐竹義重　一五七〇～一六三三
義重の嫡男、出羽久保田藩初代藩主。石田三成と親しく、関ヶ原の戦いの前年に三成が武断派大名に襲撃された時これを救出する。鷹狩り以外に文芸への関心も高く、連歌、茶道、能楽に通じていた。進歩的で英邁な名君との評価がある一方で、猜疑心が強く残忍であったともいわれる。

渋江政光（内膳）　一五七四～一六一四
佐竹義宣の近習からわずか三十歳で家老となり、禄は三千石。城の普請・城下町の整備のみならず全領土の経営に尽力し、独自に立案した「渋江田法」と呼ばれる検地法により租税の合理化を進め、藩財政の根幹を固めた。在職十一年目に大坂冬の陣が勃発、出陣した政光は前線で一隊を指揮していたが交戦中に飛弾にあたり戦死する。以降渋江家は幕末までに八人の家老を出し、藩中屈指の名家として遇された。

徳川家康　一五四二～一六一六
関ヶ原の戦いにより実質上の全国統一を果たす。東西決戦の折、佐竹軍の実戦闘は皆無であったが、家康が佐竹を完全な敵として強く意識し警戒していたことは明らかで、出羽転封はむしろ控え目な処分と言えるかもしれない。また家康は佐竹義宣について「この上ない律儀者、律儀すぎても困る」と評しているが、真意はわからない。

本多正信（佐渡守）　一五三八～一六一六
徳川家康の側近として深謀不明朗な主君の考えをもっとも理解し、水魚の交わりとまで言われた。佐竹家国替に際しては軍勢を率いて常陸領に入り水戸城受け取りの役を務めた。後に息子の本多正純が失脚し、佐竹家に預け

られる身分となったのは少々皮肉である。

和田昭為（安房守）　?〜?

義宣の祖父の代から佐竹家に仕える。佐竹家が豊臣秀吉に常陸領の支配を公認された時、本拠地となる水戸城はまだ他者の居城であったが義宣が上洛中に和田昭為らが攻め落とし、帰国の主君を迎えた。朝鮮出兵の際は名護屋参陣の義宣から国元の全権を任される。出羽転封後、間もなく引退。

剣の舞

小幡信貞（上総介）　?〜一五九二

本来は長野家の娘婿で上州甘楽郡の領主だったが、一族の反乱により所領を追われる。その後、武田信玄の助力で旧領を回復するが、結果として武田と敵対する長野家を裏切る形となった。

上泉信綱（伊勢守）　一五〇八〜一五七七

新陰流の創始者。上州上泉城主・上泉義綱の次男。現在も残る地名の読み方は「こういずみ」ではなく「かみいずみ」である。剣法家というより戦国武将として前半生を生きた彼は、長柄の槍を連ねた集団戦法の発達や鉄砲の普及等を他人事として無視できなかったに違いない。実戦からどんどん離れてゆく己が剣技を生かすにはと考え、結局スポーツにしてしまった。竹刀はその用具となる。信綱の唱えた「活人剣」について様々奥深い解釈があるようだが、その出発点はこのあたりにあるように思われてならない。信綱の手先となった疋田景忠が竹刀片手に諸国を回り、スポーツの振興活動をしたと見るのは穿ちすぎであろうか。

神後宗治　?〜?

伊豆守、後に鈴木意伯と名乗る。もともとは長野家の家臣で上泉信綱の最古参の弟子という。上洛し足利義輝、だいぶ後に豊臣秀次に剣を教える。映画「七人の侍」の中でリーダー格の侍が僧に化け、ならず者から子供を救う場面があるが、あれはもとは上泉信綱の逸話であり神後宗治はその時に信綱が使用した僧衣を授かったといわれる。

疋田景忠（文五郎）　一五三七〜一六〇五

名は豊五郎、分五郎、景兼、興信、小伯、虎伯とも。剣術の師を捜していた徳川家康が上泉信綱に相談した所、信綱は弟子の疋田景忠と柳生宗厳の二人を推薦した。家康は景忠を評し「たしかに疋田は名手であるが所詮考え方は一兵卒のものである」として退けた。一介の剣士の景忠より、小規模ながらも一地域の領主として指揮官の資質をあわせ持つ柳生宗厳の方が家康と馬が合ったであろうことは想像できる。同様に指揮官であった上泉信綱も、あるいは新陰流興隆のためには柳生こそ後継にと考えたかもしれない。さておき景忠の剣技は老年になっても衰えず、竹刀を用いて相手を気絶させることさえあったという。立ち合い前に相手に「それは悪し」と一声浴びせるのが彼のスタイルだったようだ。

宝蔵院胤栄　一五二一〜一六〇七

上泉信綱について剣を学んだが有名な槍については成田盛忠という人物に師事した。ところが武芸好きの胤栄にとってこれはほんの一部であって、彼が教えを請うた師匠は合計四十人にもなるという。研究熱心な胤栄なればこそ十文字鎌槍の考案者であるという話は多少の説得力を持つが、戦国初期の関東において松本備前守政信がすでに使いこなしていたともいわれる。

柳生宗厳　一五二九〜一六〇六

晩年に石舟斎。正式には新陰流で、柳生新陰流というのは俗称だそうである。同門の疋田景忠が疋田陰流の祖、神後宗治が神後流、丸目蔵人がタイ捨流となり柳生宗厳のみが正統な新陰流の後継者であるとされる。たしかに柳生のおかげで新陰流は徳川将軍家の剣として成功し、宗厳を選んだ上泉信綱の判断は正しかったと見ることもできる。しかし順序を逆と考えてはどうか。つまり柳生が徳川家に気に入られ剣術指南役となったために、他の新陰流たちが将軍家に遠慮して看板を変えたとする見方である。

（岩明　均）

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